

Preparing for the Lord's Supper

1 Corinthians 11:27-34

- 17 Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse.
- 18 For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it.
- 19 For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you.
- 20 Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper.
- 21 For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk.
- 22 What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you.
- 23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread;
- 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me."
- 25 In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."
- 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.
- 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.
- 33 Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.
- 34 But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come.

Today we celebrate the Lord's Supper. Jesus established two ordinances, two special services for the church: baptism and the Lord's Supper. Baptism is the outward mark of the believer, the first step in a life of obedience. Baptism pictures Christ's death, burial and resurrection. As people place their faith in Christ, we baptize them as an outward symbol of their commitment to Christ.

The second ordinance is the Lord's Supper also referred to in Scripture as communion and the Lord's Table. Through the bread and the cup the church remembers and affirms her oneness with Christ and each other.

Paul had been faithful to teach and establish these ordinances in the churches. But the Church at Corinth had perverted the Lord's Supper. Paul says to them in verse 17, "...**you come together not for the better but for the worse.**" In other words, their manner of partaking in the Lord's Supper was so bad that it would have been better if they didn't take do it at all.

The early churches practiced communion differently from most modern churches. They seem to have celebrated "**the breaking of bread**" weekly. They began with a special fellowship meal sometimes called the "**love feast**" (Jude 12). These were little more than ancient "pot-lucks" where everyone brought food and shared with each other. The love feast celebrated the oneness and unity of the church. At the conclusion of the love feast, they partook of the Lord's Supper.

Sadly, the Corinthians perverted this special service in at least two ways:

- First, they were **DIVISIVE**. Paul says in verse 18 that there were "**divisions**" among them. In verse 19 he mentions "**factions.**" They were divided by loyalties to different teachers. They were divided economically and socially. How do you know when a church is divided? You have a divided church when someone refuses to have anything to do with another member.
- Second, they were **SELFISH**. On the Lord's Day, when they came together for the love feast, they did not wait for each other. Paul says in verse 21, "**each one takes his own supper ahead of others.**" By the time everyone arrived some were "**drunk**" and because the food was gone others were "**hungry.**" The very act that was to celebrate their unity divided them. In verse 22, Paul sarcastically asks them if it was their intent to "**despise the church of God.**"

Verses 23-26 stand out like handful of diamonds dropped in a muddy road. In the midst of this horrible problem in Corinth, the Apostle Paul gives a beautiful teaching he "**received from the Lord**" concerning the Lord's Supper.

In verse 24, he gives **the purpose of the BREAD**. The bread is symbolic of the body of Christ. When we eat the bread at the Lord's Table we do it "in remembrance" of the sinless body of Jesus that bore God's wrath for our sins on the cross.

IN verse 25, Paul gives **the purpose of the CUP**. The cup in the Lord's Supper is the blood of "the Lamb of God" that was shed for our salvation. Jesus specifically said, "**This cup is the new covenant in My blood.**" Hebrews 9:28 says, "**Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many.**"

We come to the Lord's table "**in remembrance**" of Jesus. As we eat the bread, and as we drink the cup, we are to focus on Christ's sacrifice in bearing our sins on the cross. We are to remember His love for us and renew our love for Him. Verse 26 tells us we are to continue to come the Lord's Table "**often**" and in doing we "**proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.**"

In verses 27-32, we learn **how to prepare ourselves to partake of the Lord's Supper**. The key phrase is found in verse 28, **"Let a man examine himself."** I'm going to give you three reasons that everyone should carefully examine himself before taking the Lord's Supper.

I. Taking the Lord's Supper Unworthily Offends the Lord (vv.27-28).

A. THE MEANING OF EATING IN AN UNWORTHY MANNER (vv.27).

In verse 27 Paul says, **"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."**

When it comes down to it, all of us are "unworthy" to eat the Lord's Supper. None of us are worthy to be saved. All of us were utterly sinful and alienated from God. By grace alone, God sought us out while we were lost and lovingly drew us to Himself. Just as we are saved by grace, we come to the Lord's Table by grace. Though none of us are truly worthy, that's not what Paul has in mind here. This verse refers to profaning this holy ordinance. Let's consider some way we might come to the Table **"in an unworthy manner."**

- We might come to the Lord's Table **RITUALISTICALLY**. Doing the ritual without the reality. Instead of truly worshiping the Lord and reflecting on the price He paid for our sins, instead of crying out in gratitude for His grace, we might simply take the Supper because we are Christians and that is what we do. We might "go through the motions without going through any emotions."
- We may come to the Lord's Supper **LIGHTLY**. Sometimes people take communion without really dwelling on what it means. Parents, that is why I don't recommend young children who have not properly understood salvation to participate in the Lord's Supper.
- We may come to the Lord's Supper in **BITTERNESS**. I think this was the major problem in the Corinthian church, their disunity. They were not loving or forgiving each other. You cannot be right in your relationship with God if you are not right in your relationships with other people. Matthew 5:23-24 says, **"Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and go your way. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."** I think this is where most of us risk God's judgment.
- We may come to the Lord's Supper in **REBELLION**. This refers to times in our lives when we stubbornly go our own way rather than obeying the Word of God. We know what is right and wrong and we deliberately choose the wrong. If you are in rebellion and unconfessed sin, please do not take the Lord's Supper for anyone who does so **"eats and drinks judgment to himself."**

When I was a boy, my mom would call me in the house at supper time. She would ask if I washed up, which of course I would almost always say, "Yes,

Ma'am" whether I had or not. Mom would then make me stick out my hands for inspection. She wanted me to be clean when I came to her table and God wants the same from us.

Verse 27 tells us that when we take the Lord's Supper in an **"unworthy manner"** we become **"guilty of the body and blood of the Lord."** When we come to the Lord's Table in any other mindset than sincere worship we dishonor the sacrifice made for us. Jesus gave His life for our freedom from sin, death, and hell. One of the most gut-wrenching scenes in the Bible is when Jesus was dying for our sins, people at the foot of the cross mocked Him. Mark 15:29-32 says:

And those who passed by blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, "Aha! You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save Yourself, and come down from the cross!" Likewise the chief priests also, mocking among themselves with the scribes, said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. Let the Christ, the King of Israel, descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe." Even those who were crucified with Him reviled Him.

If we take the Lord's Supper ritualistically, lightly, bitterly or rebelliously we mock the sacrifice of the Lord as much as those at the scene of the cross. I can't imagine anything more offensive to the Lord.

B. THE REQUIREMENT OF EXAMINING ONESELF (vv.28).

Verse 28 says, **"But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup."** The root word for **"examine"** is *dokimos*. It's the same word rendered *"approved"* back in verse 19. Every time we have opportunity to take the Lord's Supper, we should test or **"examine"** ourselves. We must put ourselves under the microscope. We must examine our actions and attitudes. We must be willing to cleanse our hearts and hands before coming to the Table. In this sense, the Lord's Supper should be a purifying agent for the church.

The first thing we ought to examine is our salvation. In 2 Corinthians 13:5 Paul urges the church to **"Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?; unless indeed you are disqualified."** So the first question we must ask ourselves is "Am I in the faith?" "Does Jesus Christ live in me?" If you are not sure of that. Make sure today. Trust Jesus Christ to save you.

II. Taking the Lord's Supper Unworthily Brings God's Discipline (vv.29-32).

A. THE TRUTH CONCERNING GOD'S DISCIPLINE (v.29).

Verse 29 says, **"For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body."** The person who doesn't **"examine himself"** may take the Lord's Supper **"in an unworthy manner"** and not only offend the Lord by being **"guilty of the body and blood"** of Christ but he also **"eats and drinks judgment to himself."**

"Judgment" in this verse does not mean eternal punishment or **"damnation"** as in the KJV. We know that those who are saved can never again be lost. Romans

8:1 says, **“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit.”** The word **“judgment”** refers to God’s discipline. If we are not **“discerning the Lord’s body,”** if we are not reverently and soberly approaching the Lord’s Table, we are in danger of God’s chastisement coming upon our lives. Hebrews 12:6 says, **“For whom the Lord loves He chastens, And disciplines every son whom He receives.”** When our children are disrespectful and rebellious, we chastise them. We discipline them. The worse the rebellion, the worse is their punishment. In the eyes of God, profaning the Lord’s Table is of the worst sort of rebellion.

B. THE EXAMPLES OF GOD’S DISCIPLINE (v.30).

Verse 30 says, **“For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.”** Paul says, **“For this reason”** or because you have not examined yourselves **“many are weak and sick among you.”** God can use sickness to bring discipline in our lives.

Now let’s be careful to note that just because a person is sick does not mean God is disciplining them. But it could mean that. Not only were some **“weak and sick”** Paul also says, **“many sleep.”** **“Sleep”** in many New Testament passages was a word used to refer to the death of believers whose bodies will awake at the resurrection. Paul actually says **“many,”** not a few but many died because they profaned the Lord’s Table so long and so badly.

God is serious about holiness! That’s why the Bible speaks to us about the discipline of the Lord. We should fear the discipline that will come from disobedience. I learned early on to love my dad but also to fear His discipline. Fear of discipline both from my earthly father and my Heavenly Father has kept me from much trouble. Think of Ananias and Saphira. When God judged them by striking them dead, their deaths became examples to the church. Acts 5:11 says, **“So great fear came upon all the church and upon all who heard these things.”** God’s severe judgment of their sin brought healthy reverence to the church.

Sometimes when a believer refuses to repent and continually returns to sin, God just takes them home. That’s a sobering thought.

C. THE PRINCIPLE OF GOD’S DISCIPLINE (v.31).

In Verse 31 Paul gives us a simple principle for avoiding the chastisement of the Lord, **“For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.”** If we would repent of our sins, wrong attitudes and impure motives, God would not have to judge us. This is why it is so important that we examine our own lives and make everything right with God and with others before we come to the Lord’s Table.

The Lord’s Table is not for perfect people. It is for sinners. The church is not a shrine for sinless saints. It is a family of believers who have real problems. Chuck Swindoll wrote, “Churches need to be... less like untouchable cathedrals and more like well-used hospitals, places to bleed in rather than monuments to look at ... places where you can take your mask off and let your hair down ... places where you can have your wounds dressed.”

With all my heart I believe that Christ wants His church to be ... a fellowship where people can come in and say, "I'm sunk!" "I'm beat!" "I've had it!" It's a place where we can come just as we are to receive God's grace so freely given.

D. THE REASON FOR GOD'S DISCIPLINE (v.32).

Verse 32 says, "**But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.**" God chastens us because He loves us. He is our Father and we are His children. When we punish the rebellion in our children; we do so for their good so that they will grow in maturity. In the same way, God matures me by punishing my disobedience.

The Scripture clearly teaches that believers are eternally secure. This discipline does not effect our eternal standing with God. In fact in Hebrews where it discusses the Lord's discipline it makes the strong point that God only disciplines those He calls as His children. And if we are not disciplined by the Father, we are not true sons.

Jesus said in John 10:28, "**And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand.**" Nothing will separate us from Christ's love—not life, not even death. Nothing can revoke the price He paid for us on the cross. One of the reasons we are secure is because God would never let us out of His hand. He would take our lives before He would let go of us.

III. Taking the Lord's Supper Unworthily is a Sin against the Church (vv.33-34).

A. BE CONSIDERATE OF EACH OTHER (vv.33-34).

Verse 33 says, "**Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.**" When they prepared the love feast, those who arrived first were not to dig in and eat all the food. Rather they were to "**wait for one another.**" This seems like a small thing to us, but obviously it was no small thing to God. Many of them had died for their arrogant attitude. The purpose was not to indulge the flesh by eating until they were stuffed. Rather when they came together it was to celebrate their oneness together in Christ.

B. TO BE RIGHT WITH GOD WE MUST BE RIGHT WITH OTHER BELIEVERS.

The Table of the Lord is a place of connection and community and not of isolation. The The Lord's Supper is not just about your private walk with God, all by your lonesome. It is about connecting, before God, with other believers. Paul says back in 10:16-17, "**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? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.**"

We call it "Communion" for a reason; the word translated "Communion" essentially means "fellowship". It means not only a personal fellowship in relationship with God; it means also connection with other believers. The Table of the Lord means that we are not alone; if we are in fellowship with the Lord, we are in fellowship with one another at the same time.

There's a movie called *Places in the Heart*, starring Sally Field and Danny Glover. It's about an American town from the 1930s being torn apart by racism, sexism and tension between blacks and whites.

But the part I really like is the ending. The closing scene takes place in a church. All the members of the town are taking communion together. As the camera slowly pans the congregation receiving communion, we recognize all the characters — those living and dead and departed for other places. It is an image in which the lambs and the wolves, the wronged and the wrongdoers, the betrayers and the betrayed, are all together as one. Mothers and daughters who didn't get along with each other are sitting together. The murderer and the victim are together. Blacks and whites are together. Everyone gets to participate. Everyone is equal at the table of the Lord.

I think the movie makers were trying to say that “this is the kind of world we can have if we could put aside our differences. This is the kind of world we could have if we repented of our sins of prejudice and hatred. This is the kind of world we could have if we could put aside the problems of the past and come together as one at the foot of the cross.” This is the one place where we ought to be united, at the Lord's Table.

Think carefully. Is there an offense you have not forgiven? Are you harboring anger, resentment or bitterness toward other believers? If God brings judgment just because some didn't wait on the others to eat, how much more will He judge us when we fail to treat each other with grace and mercy? Being a Christian and bearing a grudge is incompatible. Listen to these verses from God's Word:

Jesus said in Mark 11:25, **“And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses.”**

1 Peter 4:8 says, **“And above all things have fervent love for one another, for love will cover a multitude of sins.”**

When Peter asked if forgiving seven times was enough, Jesus said in Matthew 18:22, **“I do not say to you, up to seven times, but seventy times seven.”**

Jesus said in Luke 17:3-4, **“Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him.”**

Ephesians 4:32 says, **“And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”**

Colossians 3:13 tells us to be **“bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.”**