

## The Lord's Supper in Biblical Perspective

I Corinthians 11:17

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*July 29, 2012– Evening Sermon*

I want to make a few remarks from God's Word before we come to the Table. I want to make a couple of practical statements after establishing a little bit of the Biblical foundations that we are reminded of in I Corinthians 11 concerning the Lord's Supper. I Corinthians 11:17-34 says

[17] But in the following instructions (these are instructions concerning the Lord's Supper) 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.

This last Saturday I had the enormous privilege of meeting with young couples whom the Lord has blessed with covenant children and they are coming to bring their children for the sign and seal of the covenant relationship with the Lord, proclaiming His promises in baptism. These couples very graciously get up very early on Saturday morning to come meet with me for an hour to go over what is baptism, the promises of God and the sign and seal of the covenant of God. Then we go over what their committing to and what God is committing to. I then explain to them about two great concerns in my life that I hope don't navigate to becoming fears in my life. Those concerns are that in the ministry of the sacraments that God's people would make one of two mistakes.

Mistake number one is a superstitious view of the sacraments whereby we give power to them that the Bible does not give power to them, converting power. That's why in baptism you never hear us use the word christening because we don't think baptism has the power to put Christ into anyone or Christianize them which is what christening is short for. Then on the other hand baptism is more than simply the profession of my faith although it does identify those who have believed in God's covenant promises for them and their household but it's also the sign and the seal of the covenant whereby people are sacredly brought into this covenant relationship, God's promises are affirmed and our commitments in humble reliance upon Divine grace are articulated. Now what does all that mean? We don't want to be superstitious but we also don't want to be superficial.

The same thing is true of the Lord's Supper. One of my great concerns today is that there seems to be a navigation on the one hand where there is always the problem that the Lord's Supper is used in a superficial way and because a church hasn't had it in a while they just tack it on to a service. Then there is just a superficial administration of it, a superficial preparation for it, and a superficial partaking of it. Do you want to know how important something is? What does God do when you misuse it? That will tell you how important it is.

God says for My people who have misused the Lord's Supper, by exalting themselves at the expense of others and coming in a manner unworthy, for this reason some are sick. This is God's refining judgment of sickness. Some of just been taken out in God's redemptive judgment. You have so dishonored Me in the Lord's Supper that some of you have died. He says the Lord's hand in this was not a condemning judgment that comes upon the world. It's a refining, redemptive judgment but it's still a judgment because we have misused something that is sacred.

So instead of superstitious and superficial, what is the sacred use of the Lord's Supper? It is a Divinely, designed means of grace. You probably heard me say it three times when I read the text— come together for the better not for the worse. It has been designed for our growth and grace which immediately tells you that the Lord's Supper is not for sinless people. I wouldn't need to come for better if I was already perfect, right? I wouldn't need to grow if I have already arrived. So clearly this is not for perfect people. It's for sinners who are saved by grace who desire to grow, not for grace, but grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. Our Lord has designed it in a very specific way.

There are some things that are done in the context of the Lord's Supper and I want to give you a couple of thoughts on this and leave you with three practical thoughts related to this as we come to the Table this Lord's Day. The first is that in the text on five different occasions it says 'when you come together.' That is the translation for the verb form of the noun for the church. When you see the word church in your Bible except for three instances, it translated *ecclesia* which means the gathering of the people or the coming together of the people. That's why staying home and watching a worship service streaming on the internet is not church. That is listening to a sermon. That's not church. Church is coming together. Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together as is the habit of some (Hebrews 10:25). Some of you who have that marvelous gift of mercy are probably saying "Okay preacher, there are some by providential hindrance can't come together with others. So what do we do?" We go to them and come together with them. So myself and a couple of other pastors, elders and others will go to a shut in room with them and have an assembly. It is a called assembly of the church. It doesn't take but two or three but we've come together, called by the elders to give praise and glory to the Lord and we'll administer the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper is not a private administration where someone's small group might need a pick-me-up at the end of their meeting so they have the Lord's Supper then. No, that's not the purpose of it. It's not a mechanism for manipulation. It is a means of grace that has been designed by God that is sacred. It is to be used thoughtfully and you're to come together, secondly, in manner worthy. Now notice it doesn't say to come together as if you're worthy but it says to come together in a manner worthy. Very practically that is why we never administer the Lord's Supper without letting you know through our Midweek newsletter/bulletin, our church website, or by announcing it the previous week during services so that you can prepare to come to the Table in a manner worthy.

There are a couple of things Paul draws out about the worthy manner. First of all he says that when you come together in a manner worthy then you have examined yourself. That in itself is a blessing in the Lord's Supper. Most of us do not live our life in self-examination. We live our life in other examination. The

Bible tells us to encourage one another and examine ourselves but normally we encourage ourselves and examine others, but the Lord's Supper is an automatic call from the Lord to say I'm not going to examine my brothers but I'm going to examine myself. Where am I in my relationship with the Lord? Then I will be ready to encourage my brothers and sisters in the Lord, for the Lord and to the Lord.

The second thing Paul says about properly examining ourselves is not only examining myself in my relationship with the Lord but examining myself in relationship with the body of Christ. I'm to discern the body rightly he says. The short hand of that is when you come to the Table and you had that announcement, you look around at your brothers and sisters and you have aught against anyone, the Table calls you to go forgive them as freely as the Table reminds you that you have been forgiven. Who do I need to forgive? Or the flipside is who do I need to ask to forgive me? The glorious thing is that Jesus Christ has removed our account of sin legally against us and the Table not only reminds us that our account has been cleaned out by the blood of Jesus and it has been given a new account, the righteousness of Christ, but it calls us to keep a short account with each other. Ask forgiveness and be ready to forgive one another.

I'm so grateful that I have the privilege to preach that without some serious division in the body of Christ at Briarwood. We don't have that kind of division here. I believe that in the pursuit of the unity of the body of Christ we are to maintain the unity that is ours in Christ and we are to promote that unity— the unity of the Spirit in Christ— but in this side of eternity, in the professing church there will be divisions because unity is according to truth but never at the expense of truth. Let me make something clear here. Unity is promoted by the truth but never at the expense of truth and sometimes divisions are there because of who is holding to the truth and who is beginning to abandon the truth or who has abandoned the truth. For instance, in mainline Christianity today it is just about to die. These great stalwart denominations of the faith which have been there for years upon years upon years are rapidly disappearing. Why? It is because they are abandoning the truth. When you abandon the truth you have left the foundation, you have left what is all unity and what has all directed us. I want to put a qualifier here. That does not mean we treat tertiary doctrines as if they are primary doctrines in these matters. In other words, here is the Gospel. That's a primary doctrine. If you get the Gospel wrong you have everything wrong. Paul said in I Corinthians 15 I delivered to you those things of first importance. If there are some things of first importance what does that tell you in the Christian life? It means that there are some things of secondary importance and it doesn't mean they are not important.

It means we have enough sense to know that if you get the Gospel wrong then you can't be a Christian. If you get baptism wrong you can be a Christian, unless you think if you get baptism wrong you can't be a Christian, then we have to go

back to the Gospel for you to get that right. We are not saved by works even when it involves something as sacred as baptism. Then there is the mode of baptism. Are we going to use water, how much and where? That is a tertiary doctrine, but having said that and I thank the Lord for having the privilege to serve with elders, deacons, staff that understand all Scripture is important but some things are primary, some are secondary and some are tertiary. Having said that I want to give a warning— very seldom have churches abandoned primary doctrines first but they make primary errors to abandon secondary doctrines first. In other words, to abandon secondary doctrines they do things with the Scripture that with just one generation they'll be leaving primary doctrines because of how they are handling the Scriptures. That's why unity is prized but never at the expense of truth but in the pursuit of truth together, lovingly, patiently, humbly with one another. There is one other thing I want to mention to you as we come to this Table. Paul says He took the bread and gave it. The bread points us to the body of Christ. He does in the Supper what He did in eternity. He took the bread and gave it. He took a Body and He came into this world and He gave it on the cross for you. He took the cup also. The cup is the cup of the fruit of the vine which represents the blood of Christ and He gave it. What does He do on the cross? When that Body He took that He gave, He died an atoning death. He took His life blood and poured it out and gave it for you. We are about to do this— take, give, remember. Christ, 2000 years ago took His body and His life and gave it for you.

Here is one other thought. He took the bread, He took the cup and He gave it after He had given thanks. This deserves so much more treatment but remember He is about to leave this Supper and He'll go to the garden. You will then see His full humanity knowing what He is about to endure on the cross as all of hell for one time in history comes to earth and poured out upon Him. He said in the garden in the agony of prayer, sweating blood, "Father, if there be any way let this cup pass from Me." He knows the horrors of what He is about to take and drink and give to you, the cup of Life, but at this Supper, knowing all of that and all that He is about to suffer, He gives thanks to do the will of the Father to suffer for us. He gave the bread and the cup after He had given thanks for the call of the Father for His glory to love us from our sins into a saving relationship with the Almighty God. That's why the Bible reminds us that it has been granted unto you to suffer for His Sake, who suffered proportions that are unmentionable and without measure and He gave thanks before He suffered, even as He called upon the Father saying "If there be any other way but if there's not I take and give Myself" so that for you and me and to the glory of the Father there is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. That is Christ. So this Table calls us to die. Here is your Life. It is Christ who took and gave to you, because He took a Body and gave Himself on the cross for you. Oh amazing love, how Divine, all love's excelling for glory in eternity and time. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be together as we come to this Table for the Lord's Supper. Father, we have come to prepare our hearts. Father, we have come from Your Word. We have not entered into this out of vain intuition. We have come to the Table by Divine revelation through the instructions You have given in the biographical accounts of the Table in the Gospels and the instructive account of the Apostle Paul so that we might not fall into the trap of misusing what has been Divinely designed that we might grow in grace. Now Father, while I pray for our carefulness and our reverence, I also pray for a holy carelessness that we come now with great joy, not as people who are worthy but in a manner worthy focused upon Christ, who makes us worthy. For worthy is the Lamb to receive glory and honor and praise. Just as our mouth will open and ingest these ordinary elements for the sacred purpose You've designed, because of Your Word by Your Spirit with our eyes fixed on Jesus, our soul opens and here at the Table we would taste and drink the Lord is good, for I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.

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