

The Lord's Supper in Biblical Perspective: Who Shall Sit at the Lord's Table?

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

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Let's look at that very familiar but unfathomable text of Scripture that defines and delineates the Lord's Supper for us which is I Corinthians 11. One of the things all of you have heard me say this Lord's Day and referred to the previous Lord's Day is I think there are two traps we can fall into as a Great Commission church. One is we get so enamored with God's command to make disciples of all the nations that we focus on what we do by sending the Gospel out there without working the Gospel in here. I call it a donut church where there is just a big hole in the middle. There are a lot of things happening outside but there's a big hole in the middle. So we don't want to fall into that trap. That could be an easy trap for Briarwood because one of our significant legacy has always been world missions and we rejoice in accomplishing that. So we want to ask God continually, "Lord, we want to make disciples of all the nations but we want to begin here."

Recently I read a book that really questioned whether we as Christians ought to be prioritizing the work of the Gospel in our own nation if we're really world Christians. I would disagree with that hypothesis that if you have a burden for your own nation that of necessity means that you're not really a world Christian in your heart outreach. My reasoning is that there is no doubt that the Apostle Paul had a heart for the world, but do you remember what he said in the book of Romans? He said, "I would willingly be accursed if only my people, my nation, would hear Christ. My heart's desire is that my brethren in the flesh would come to Christ."

John Knox had a great heart for the world of evangelism yet John Knox said, "Give me Scotland or I die." The result of God answering that prayer was an overflow of blessing to many of us yet to this day because of what he did that was sent to the nations. Here is an example. I have a heart for your family but for me to bless your family is not to neglect my family. I have to make my family a priority in order to bless your family. In order for us to bless the nations then we want to reach our nation. The answer to not being a donut church is to make sure that none of us are donut Christians. That is that we personally are sharing Christ with our friends.

Also we don't want to fall into the other trap where we get so consumed and enamored with what needs to happen in our own nation and in our own people that we begin to treat Christianity as if it is our own tribal religion instead of the Gospel to go to all of the nations, beginning in our Jerusalem, our nation and around the world. So we want to stay away from those two traps where one trap is all about us where Christianity becomes a tribal religion and Jesus becomes our tribal God for our people. The other trap is to be so consumed with what is happening out there that we're not doing what we're called to do here. We're so busy sending missionaries we forget that we're all missionaries.

That brings me to the second thing where sometimes God puts those two things together. For instance, we have been focusing on world evangelism to all the nations but we live in an age of mobility and technology that many of the nations are already here. Many times they are much more open to listening to the Gospel while they are here than they would have been if we were with them in their own nation. So we have a great opportunity through hospitality to share Christ and through friendship and relationships. Then we get to see the Lord do it.

I experienced that just this week in which focusing here locally going globally here actually is helping us go out there. It happened in our Japanese congregation. I'm not going to use names because I think that would be a violation of Asian culture if I did that but I did get permission to share with you what happened. There is a young lady who has been coming to our Japanese congregation this past year. When she was coming she realized she was a sinner and her response to Pastor Coe was "I am too sinful to be saved." Then Pastor Coe had the great opportunity to share with her that "God's grace is greater than all of our sin." Over a period of time she came to know Jesus Christ as her Lord and Savior. She experienced one our Wednesday night times and she was sharing that and God brought her to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

Then she came to the mission's conference. At one of the mission conference night's she was all upset. So Pastor Coe went to her and said "Why are you upset?" It was right after she had come from a Global glimpse and she said to him "This is so exciting so why didn't you make me come every night?" Do you know how every pastor longs to hear that request? Why didn't you make me come every night? Then she said to him, "We need to bring everybody here for this mission's conference. When I am able and retire I want to go be a missionary." Then Pastor Coe had even better news for her and said "That would be wonderful but you don't have to wait because you can be a missionary right here, right now."

It is that heart for the Gospel that gives us a time to come around the Lord's Supper. I just want to share with you from this text of Scripture that when we come here to focus on the Gospel it's no accident that when Jesus designed the Lord's Supper He put two elements for us to partake of. What are they? It is the bread and the fruit of the vine. He has given us the juice of the grape and the

bread. He said the bread is My body and the fruit of the vine is My blood so where is He bringing us back to? He is bringing us back with these elements back to the cross. He is not bringing us to the manger, the virgin birth because that is assumed. He is not bringing us to the empty tomb but that we rejoice in. He is bringing us to that moment in history where the love of God met the holiness of God and saved sinners by the grace of God. "At the cross, at the cross, where I first saw the Light and the burdens of my heart rolled away." So when we come to the Table we are brought back to our Hope, the atoning death of Jesus Christ, who paid for all of our sins.

So the Apostle Paul wants to make sure we stay focused whenever we do this and he does so by giving us this text in I Corinthians 11. I Corinthians 11:17-34 says

17 But in the following instructions I do not command you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. (In other words, I have designed this Supper as a means of grace. It is supposed to help you to grow in grace to go forward for the better but when you're not coming together rightly it is 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 (the work on the cross) 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.

Clearly the Lord's Supper is that which we enjoy by the grace of God as God's divine designed appointment to point us back to the Gospel that was accomplished for us at the work of the cross. Very briefly I want to give you five things that enable this to be for the better in our life when we come together. I call them the five "E's" of the Lord's Supper.

The first one is when we come together it is to worship so the Lord's Supper is a part of the time in which we "exalt" God. We don't exalt each other. We don't exalt the church. We don't exalt anything else but that doesn't mean we don't honor the church or each other but we exalt God for He is high and lifted up. Why did Jesus die for your sins? It was because God loved you and sent His Son. More than sent His Son, God sent His Son to the cross. More than sent His Son to the cross, God sent hell upon His Son on the cross so you and I could have life. How great is our God! How great is His love for you and me! So when we come together we exalt God.

Secondly, we not only exalt God but we take the time to "examine" ourselves. In fact the text said "When you come together come in a manner worthy..." That does not mean that I am worthy of what Christ did for me. It means that when I come to focus upon what Christ did for me, don't treat that moment superficially. Don't treat that moment with triviality. This is a sacred moment. We are sitting with the Savior to partake of the benefits of our Savior. So to come in a manner worthy the next verse says "Therefore examine yourself..." Come prepared to confess your sins, focus upon Christ and in a manner that honors the Lord, not that we're ever worthy of what the Lord did but we want to come in a manner to honor the Lord who is worthy to save. So we don't treat this moment superstitiously or superficially but we treat it with integrity and every time we have the Lord's Supper we make sure it's announced a week before so that you can prepare and we don't just come to the table. We come in a manner worthy of the Lord. In other words, it's not worthy for the Lord to save us but it's worthy of the Lord's name in the way that we come to it.

The third "E" is that when we come together, we come together to "encourage" one another. Five times it said in the text "when you come together." It said "wait for one another." It said, "Don't eat your meal by yourself and look at people who don't have anything but you're one with each other in Christ when you come together." The Bible also says "Do not forsake the assembling of yourself together. But come together all the more to encourage one another to stimulate one another."

I passed an email this week onto the people who keep the grounds here at our church. This gentleman visits our church from Montgomery whenever he can but this time he had not come up on a Sunday to visit our church but he had come up to bring his child to Children's Hospital. It was a very difficult time. They were expecting difficult news. He said, "I drove up and as soon as I got on the campus

God gave me peace. God gave me encouragement and then I talked to some of the people there. God brought even more encouragement."

That is one of the things I pray for every week that when we come together on the Lord's Day we will be an encouragement to each other. We live in a broken world in which we have much adversity and that doesn't mean we don't deal with each other's sins. That doesn't mean we don't deal with difficult things but that does mean that our heart's desire is to encourage one another in the Lord. Wait for one another. Encourage one another when we come together.

The fourth thing is the "evangelism" of the lost. This is reminding us that we are focused on the Gospel and the only reason we are at this Table is that Jesus used somebody and probably more than just one person, to lead us to Christ that we can come to this Table in Christ. As I am sitting at this Table do you know what I'm thinking? Who out there can I share Christ with so the next time we come to the Table they can come to? Who out there can't come here because I haven't gone to them yet? Lord, this Table reminds me to go to the many who are yet to sit at the Table of the Lord, to preach the Gospel until He comes again.

That brings me to the fifth thing which is the "expectation" of Christ's return. We will do this Supper until we get to the Feast with the Lord in eternity. This Table is the table we will do until that Day. We break this bread. We share this cup. We come together exalting God, examining ourselves, encouraging one another, evangelizing the lost until Christ comes again. Then when Christ comes again O what a glorious day that will be!

One word as you come to the Table. Take these moments and refocus and make Christ and His atoning work the center of your life, not His church. His church He uses to make sure you stay focused on Him. Honor His church. Praise the Lord, I love His sacred church but His church is here that you might focus on Him. This Table is here and it's the Lord's Table. It's not Briarwood's table but it's the Lord's Table. Focus on Him. Focus on Him with all your heart.

By the way, when we get to heaven will we exalt God? I'm not trying to trick you. Yes when Jesus comes back we will exalt God. Will we need to examine ourselves? Nope because I will be like Him and I'll rejoice that He has brought me into the perfections where I can grow and learn of Him for all of eternity. I just wrote a blog on what an accountability group is and when Jesus comes back I won't need my accountability group anymore. We'll just be an encouragement group from then on but one thing I won't be able to do of those five things.

One thing I won't be able to do at all is evangelize anybody when Jesus comes back. So today as you come to the Table to be encouraged to refocus on Christ. Be renewed to take this Jesus to those whom you know that they might know Him also. Look at I John 1:9 which says "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and

just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" as our elders prepare the Table. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for these moments as we meditate confessing our sins, examining ourselves and looking to the Lord Jesus our Savior to lift You up. Help Your people to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ. I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.

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