

## **The Lord's Supper in Biblical Perspective: Preparing for the Lord's Supper**

**I Corinthians 11:17-34**

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*April 26, 2015 – Morning Sermon*

This is the Word of God. It's the truth. 1 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.

What is the purpose of the Lord's Supper? The Lord's Supper is the New Covenant meal designed to enable God's covenant people to grow in the grace and knowledge of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Evangelical churches, that is churches committed to Christ, the Great Commission, and the Great Commandment to love one another with all our heart, soul and mind, view the Lord's Supper as very precious and that preciousness is expressed in many ways. In reformed churches and the Presbyterian branch of the reformation churches, have indicated the importance historically of the Lord's Supper, not by its weekly frequency, but by our focused intentionality. Instead of it being just at the end of every service, when we have it we bring everything to focus upon it. We want to do it often and the Bible doesn't tell us how often but it just says as often, but when we do it we want to bring absolute focus to the Lord's Supper and its proper use. Thus we do the ministry of the Word first before you come to the Table because you are partaking of Christ by faith and faith comes by hearing the Word of Christ so we go to Scripture. There is not a much better passage than I Corinthians 11.

Providentially this passage comes not out of a commendation but for purposes of correction. In fact in the book of Corinthians there are seven things or questions that Paul felt needed to be addressed. One of them is instead of the Lord's Supper being an asset it had become a liability, instead of it unifying it had divided, instead of it being focused upon Christ it had become that people began focusing on themselves. So Paul is making some very clear corrections as he is dealing with it.

In doing so Paul lays out for us definitively the purpose and blessings of the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper when properly engaged it is a particular blessing to renew, recalibrate and refocus. It is a renewal of your covenant relationship with the Lord. There are many things that can happen in our lives as believers where we can get off track, detoured, distracted and even become wrongly directed over a period of time. I'm particularly focused on believers who are repentant of sin, hating sin, killing sin and desirous out of love to Christ to obey Christ. Even with that God-given, grace-empowered, grace-enabled, Christ-centered desire to kill sin, pursue Christ, it is so easy that you begin to do that out of love to Christ but over a period of time you begin to think the better you do it the more Christ will love you. You have to remember that what you do doesn't get any love from Jesus because you received all the love you need from the cross. So the body and blood of Christ is to refresh us, renew us and encourage us.

We so easily begin to move to think that God's effective work in our life is based upon what we do and allow Him to do rather than what He has done and allows us to do. So the Table recalibrates us back to a Christ-centered approach. The

Table refocuses us so that while there are many things we're dealing with in our life, marriages, families and relationships in serving the Lord, we get back to that which is primary – fixing our eyes on Jesus and the work of Christ on the cross.

It is no accident that the wine and the bread are the body and blood of Christ. The Table doesn't bring us back to the manger. The Table doesn't bring us to the empty tomb. The Table does not bring us to the crown of Jesus ascended. It brings us to the cross. Now it assumes the incarnation because His death on the cross would have been meaningless if this was not the Son of God who had taken upon Himself humanity. It affirms the resurrection because we do this until He comes again the text says. He can't come again if He is still in that grave. So He is risen, ascended and coming again but the focus is at the cross, where my burdens rolled away. It's at the cross where the Son of God, for the glory of God, drank the wrath of God, so that we by the grace of God could be saved to the glory of God. It was at the cross where the love of God met the justice of God and sinners by the grace of God are saved to the glory of God.

Now because the Table is so important for that, the question is how can I come in a manner worthy? So from this text I want to give you a couple of thoughts and then we'll partake of the Table. I want to answer three questions for you from this text. First is how do I prepare for the Lord's Supper, come in a manner worthy? Second, why should I prepare for the Lord's Supper in a manner worthy? Thirdly, what is the result in remembering the Lord's Supper, the Lord, in a manner worthy? So let's start by answering the first question.

How do I prepare for the Lord's Supper? In our framework and testimony in Christ's church we don't rest on the importance of it by its weekly frequency but by its intentionality which is why we announced last week that we would be having the Lord's Supper this week. Here is a passage of Scripture that tells you to prepare your heart for the Lord's Supper. It is not only intentionality that this service is built around the Lord's Supper to properly understand it but it's the intentionality of God's people that they have prepared to come to the Lord's Supper with intentionality. How do we do that?

There are two things we do in preparing and the first thing we do is remember Christ and the cross. The Supper is designed to point you to Christ and the cross. It is there that you fix your hope and your heart alone. Secondly, is you examine yourself. I Corinthians 11:27–28 says [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. So what is the answer to not coming in a manner unworthy? It is to examine yourself. I Corinthians 11:29 says [29] For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.

So the first thing I do is to remember Christ and the cross whereby I'm set free from sin's penalty and power. The next thing I do is examine myself in my walking away from the practice of sin in my life. Is there in my life any high handed sin against God? Is there in my life any secret peace treaties I have signed with sin? Then the Lord's Supper becomes the call and the opportunity for me to go after it and confess my sins before the Lord, examine and discern for I look inside my heart. Where is my heart in my relationship to Christ and His Word? Then I look outside. What about my relationships for Christ? What is my relationship to the leadership of His church and the fellowship of His church? Do I have aught against my brothers and sisters? Would I mock God by coming to the Table with aught in my heart or would I go deal with it redemptively? This is so that we not only confess our sins to the Lord but to one another in the Lord and for the Lord. If this is true for the family of God how true it should be with any of our other relationships – wife, children, friends etc.

There should be no high handed sin with the Lord and others. That is a very real picture. The picture of high handed sin is saying 'no God' and we raise our hand against Him. High handed sin against others is when we say 'no, I refuse to love you and I'm going to keep you at an arm's distance.' If we deal with those sins what would happen to the body as it not only would partake of one bread but it would live as a body of believers, confessing and forgiving, not only before the Lord but one another.

If that is how I prepare for the Lord's Supper why should I do all this? Here are seven reasons why you should. The first reason is because the Lord commands us to do so. In this text the Lord commands us to come in a manner worthy. Let's be clear here. It's not that you're worthy to come to the Table for we are not. If we were worthy to come to the Table we wouldn't need the worthy Lamb to be slain for us. The text is saying we need to come in a manner worthy of the Lamb who is worthy to bring us to the Table. It's like when Paul says to walk in a manner worthy of your calling, which is we come in a method worthy. We do this because the Lord commands it and if you love Him you keep His commands.

The second reason is because the Passover instructs us to do so. The Old Covenant meal was full of blood for it was sacrificing lambs that weren't worthy to point to the coming of the Passover Lamb who would be worthy. If you want to know all the things they had to do to prepare for the Passover go read Exodus 12, 13 and Numbers 9. There were over thirty plus admonitions they had to fulfill before they came to the Passover. Aren't you glad it's more simple here? He is teaching us something and that is we come to the Table of grace carefully. Somehow we think in our testimony to the world that we're saved by grace is proven by how careless we are in our Christian life or how trivial we are about sin. The world ought to see people who hate sin and love Jesus but realize in humility that it's not their hatred of sin and loving of Jesus that is going to save them but it's Jesus that has saved them. That is why they hate their sin and love

their Jesus. So here are these glorious lessons we get from the Old Covenant meal, the Passover.

Thirdly, it is who invites us and partakes with us. If I could change something in my life it would have been to try and hold onto the evening family meal for longer than I did. It wasn't all that busy when I was growing up and we didn't have all this technology that saves us of all this time but also robs us of all this time. Therefore we all had our meal together night after night. Do you know what it is like when you have sit down with the family on a regular basis and look eyeball to eyeball? You keep short accounts. The Lord's Supper is a meal that causes us to prepare because of who invited us and that's Jesus. Who prepared it? It is Jesus. Who is invited to eat with Him? It is us and His family.

The fourth reason we do this is why God provides the Supper for us. It is for our better (or worse) for there is no neutrality.

The fifth reason is because the Supper is designed for us to do so. Do this often to grow in grace. The obedience of a Christian is imperfect and uneven so stay at it. Keep coming back to Him for He has given the Table as an instrument for you to keep recalibrating, refocusing and to be renewed in your relationship with Him. He has designed it to promote the carefulness of your life in Christ and for Christ.

The sixth reason is because of the warnings if we neglect to come in a manner worthy. He said in the text that for this reason some of you are weak and some are dead. This is because you have mocked God by coming to the Table in a manner unworthy. If you do have sin in your life you don't want to deal with it doesn't please the Lord for you to stay away from the Table because of sin. What pleases the Lord is if you deal with the sin and come to the Table. When you are being shepherded by this church, whether from this pulpit, a congregational community, or there are some difficulties and challenges in your life, don't run for the Table calls you back to Him and His people want to bring you to Him. He wants you to be renewed, recalibrated and refreshed in the Lord.

If you'd rather stay in the sin He says this isn't like the judgment that falls on the world but this is My loving discipline of you to teach you. In some cases, where our witness is so dishonoring to Christ, He just goes ahead and takes people on home. They don't finish strong, they just finish. He says this Table is to tell you to deal with those sins and remind you that because of the cross you can confess your sins and He is faithful and just to forgive you of those sins and to cleanse you from all unrighteousness. The seventh reason why is because of the Divine, assured blessings promised when we do so. You come together for the better. He has designed this Table for you to grow. It is something that is necessary to give to you so you can grow, be renewed, recalibrated, refocused and it doesn't matter who you are or wherever you are in your life. If you love Christ and you're serious about sin then we more than anybody need this Table to come back to

focus on Christ and the cross. There is our hope in life. There is the place we find encouragement.

The last question is what should I remember when I come in a manner worthy to the Lord's Supper? For God's glory and by His grace, Christ at the cross has delivered me from the power and penalty of sin; He is delivering me from the practice of sin; and on that Day He will deliver me from the presence of sin into His presence forever. C.S. Lewis was famous for saying that the Lord was either a liar, a lunatic or Lord. He borrowed that from a wonderful, Scots preacher John "Rabbi" Duncan and he was called Rabbi Duncan because he was such a good teacher. He talked about this thing called the trilemma. He said it this way; either Jesus was self-diluted, diluting others, or He was who He said He was. Those are your only three possibilities.

I loved something that John "Rabbi" Duncan did at a time he was taking the Lord's Supper. He had finished talking about something similar to what I just said in this study and he saw this dear saint reach out for the bread and then pull back, trembling in tears. He went up and put his hands on her face and said "My dear why will you not take?" She said, "I am a sinner" and he said "Dear child, this Table is for you, sinners saved by grace, who desire to grow in grace for His glory." This Table is for you. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for these moments we could be together as we come to the Lord's Table for we would rejoice in Him alone, who is our Savior. We come confessing that we are not worthy but we would come in a manner worthy that the warnings we need not be concerned about and the blessings we look forward to, unity in the body of Christ, being recalibrated and renewed with You and each other and being refocused upon You to encourage one another. Then send us into this world that others may see in us and hear from us 'Jesus saves' for I pray this in Jesus' Name, Amen.

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