

"THERE IS MORE TO REMEMBERING THAN NOT FORGETTING"

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

THEME: The Lord's Supper

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Dr. John Crocker, First Evangelical Free Church, Rockford, IL.

It's a quirk of human nature that several people can all look at the same item and each one see something different. According to the Talmud, *'We see things not as they are but as we are.'*

A little city girl went on a field trip with her second grade class to a real working farm. It was the first time she had seen livestock up close and personal. The farmer showed them the cattle and told how they produced the milk children drink every day. Then they moved on to some of the other animals. The little girl drew close to the farmer and said, "That's a funny-looking cow. Why doesn't it have horns like the others?" The farmer explained, "Some cows just don't get horns, but the reason this cow doesn't have any horns is because it's a horse."

That kind of innocent misinterpretation is common among children. But adults can grow old holding on to mistaken notions about reality.

- This is the case with Communion, or the Lord's Supper.

The worst misinterpretation was a rumor spread by opponents of Christianity in the first century. They said this Christian ritual was actually a cannibalistic practice in which people ate someone's body and drank someone's blood.

They twisted the words of our Lord Jesus Christ in which he referred to the bread being his body and the wine being his blood.

- There's a variety of opinions today about the meaning of this Christian observance.

Some treat it as an insignificant tradition that is sometimes tacked on at the end of a church service.

Others have the notion that by merely participating in this observance they get into God's good graces.

- This morning we'll look at what the Apostle Paul wrote about the Lord's Supper.

What he wrote is probably the earliest written account of the ordinance of the Lord's Supper.

Paul wrote it in a letter around A.D. 55, years before any of the gospels were circulated in written form.

He wrote it to correct misunderstandings and gross abuses in the way the Corinthian Christians dealt with it.

- In his other letters Paul doesn't address this ordinance. If it hadn't become a problem in the Corinthian church, he might never have dealt with the Lord's Supper.

This practice had broken down in Corinthian, so Paul wrote to fix it. It's from his fixing that we learn how to observe the Lord's Supper.

What are we doing when we celebrate communion? Why is this important in the life of a church?

In 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 the apostle Paul provides crucial **explanations** for the proper observance of the Lord's Supper.

I. WE VALIDATE THE LORD'S SUPPER BY OUR UNITY (11:17-22 27-34)

This is about the attitude of those who participate in Communion.

If we don't love and respect each other we invalidate the ordinance.

- See how Paul puts it:

¹⁷ *In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good.*

¹⁸ *In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it.*

¹⁹ *No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval.*

²⁰ *When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat,*

²¹ *for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk.*

²² *Don't you have homes 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 praise you for this? Certainly not!*

Paul said he could not affirm them, because when they came to communion it was, literally, *not for the better, but for the worse.* He said *'Your meetings do more harm than good.'*

- It was the common practice in the early church to celebrate communion in conjunction with a meal that Christians shared. It was sometimes called a “love feast.” (see Jude 12)

Each person brought to the meal whatever he/she could manage.

But the love feast had become a travesty.

They weren’t sharing. They didn’t wait for some—like the household slaves who couldn’t come to the feast until they had completed their chores.

- We don’t know all the details, but the point that the Apostle Paul makes is this: The Lord’s Supper is authentic only when you observe it in a spirit of unity and mutual respect.

In the previous chapter Paul described this in a vivid metaphor: *‘Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.’* (1 Corinthians 10:16-17)

We accept and respect one another as members of the spiritual body of Christ, his Church.

If this doesn’t happen, then *‘it is not the Lord’s Supper you eat.’* (v.20)

- This right attitude is a very serious matter.

²⁷ *Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.*

²⁸ *A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.*

²⁹ *For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.*

³⁰ *That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.*

³¹ *But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment.*

³² *When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.*

³³ *So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other.*

³⁴ *If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment. And when I come I will give further directions.*

We must examine our attitudes and judge ourselves before we partake.

Paul makes it clear there may be unpleasant physical consequence of violating the Lord’s Supper.

- The Lord’s Table is a table where love prevails.

The Order of Service in the Kirk of Scotland invites those who are *‘in love and charity’* to participate in communion.

- The Lord’s Supper can be hazardous to your health.

Paul said, literally, *‘But let a person prove/examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.’* (v.28)

He did not say, *‘Let a person examine himself and if his attitude is rotten he may abstain.’*

That is not an invitation to abstain. It is command from our Lord’s servant to make things right so that you can participate.

We validate the Lord’s Supper by observing it in Christian love and unity.

[2nd crucial explanation for the proper observance of the Lord’s Supper]

II. WE COMMEMORATE THE LORD’S SUPPER AS A PRIORITY (11:23-25)

If the Lord’s Supper can be potentially dangerous, and nothing to be toyed with, why not just leave it alone?

How important is it to put communion into our service schedule?

Paul cites our Lord who said, “Do it.” That makes it very important.

²³ *For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night 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, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."*

Jesus Christ instituted this observance at the last supper with his disciples.

The setting was the Jewish Passover--an annual celebration of God’s intervention to deliver Israel from slavery in Egypt.

Jesus deliberately presented himself as the lamb sacrificed to deliver people from bondage to sin.

- If there is anything we do together as a church that is supposed to be important, this is it. Jesus told his followers to do it. Christ’s death is the pivotal point of our Christian faith—Jesus Christ’s atoning death for our sins. It’s the central truth of the gospel.

The Apostle Peter wrote, *‘For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.’* (1 Peter 3:18)

Every person in that upper room with Jesus would actually see him crucified.

The shocking sights of the Cross would be seared into their memories.

- They knew the bread and cup were symbolic, but they didn’t understand their significance until after his death and resurrection.

There in the upper room, before it happened, Jesus told them to keep the scene alive in their minds.

- None of us stood at Calvary 2000 years ago when Christ’s body hung limp on that old rugged cross and his blood flowed out of his body to free us from the guilt of our sins.

But when we take the bread and the cup we get close to the scene to groan and perhaps to weep as we feel the weight of sin that was placed upon him.

Fanny Crosby said it so clearly in her song, *Near the Cross*. In the third stanza she writes, *‘Near the cross! O Lamb of God, bring its scenes before me; help me walk from day to day with its shadows o’er me.’*

Taking communion is supposed to be an intimate and intense experience for every Christian.

This is why Jesus said to his disciples when he gave them the bread and the cup, *‘This is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.’*

That’s why we commemorate the Lord’s Supper as a priority.

[3rd crucial explanation for the proper observance of the Lord’s Supper]

III. WE ASSOCIATE THE LORD’S SUPPER WITH OUR EXPECTANCY (11:26)

Every Christian knows that Jesus Christ established his church to proclaim the good news about what he accomplished on the cross for sinners everywhere.

Proclaiming the good news means the same thing as to preach the gospel.

That’s why we exist—that’s why we’re here.

That’s why we have the word “evangelical” in our name. We are all about the gospel—the good news of Christ that points to the cross and emanates from the cross where Jesus died for us.

²⁶ *For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.*

Until Christ returns we are supposed to call each other to *the Lord’s Supper*.

I suppose for the rest of their lives the apostles and disciples would say: *‘I can’t drink this cup without reliving the scene of our Lord dying on that blood-stained cross. Every time I take the unleavened bread, again I’m watching our Master’s battered body staggering along the road to Golgotha.’*

We make a proclamation about Christ’s sacrificial death for our sins on the cross every time we celebrate Communion.

Paul wrote, *‘Whenever you do this, you are telling about our Lord’s death. So keep on doing it* (the verb tense is continuous).’ (vv.24, 25)

- During this age while we wait for his return we remember his agony and his death as our Savior. When he returns we will be in awe of his majesty as our Lord.

There’s expectancy in the Lord’s Supper. We do this “until he comes.”

We look back to the cross, the scene of Christ’s sacrifice, and we look forward to our Lord’s return.

In Matthew’s account of the Lord’s Supper we read Jesus’ words, *‘This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father’s kingdom.’* (Matthew 26:28-29)

My imagination is hard-pressed to picture the scene at that great event in heaven when our Salvation is consummated. Our Lord Jesus Christ will once again share in the Lord’s Supper.

I imagine him giving the bread and the cup to each of us, and saying, ‘Remember, this is how you got here!’

- Our sins caused Christ to suffer the horror of death on a Cross.

But Communion is not a memorial in which we mourn and pay our last respects to Christ.

No! We pay our everlasting respects, because he arose from the dead to give eternal life to all who repent and believe in him.

- When we celebrate communion we look forward to our Lord Jesus Christ’s coming. We look forward to God’s kingdom coming in its fullness and completely destroying the devil’s dominion.

We believe the best is yet to come for all who have believed in Jesus Christ and received him as their Savior.

In a few moments all who have placed their trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior will be invited to participate in the sacred observance of Communion, the Lord's Supper.

We know that our Lord is concerned about our attitudes. We will do more harm than good to ourselves and others if we involved in any discord or disunity in the church. Taking Communion with the wrong attitude can be dangerous.

He's concerned about whether we take this seriously and not just observe it as a religious ritual. It should be a high priority in our spiritual lives.

He's concerned about us partaking with expectancy. The celebration of the Lord's Supper in the way we do it now will come to an end when he comes. We're supposed to long for Christ's appearing in glory.