

EATING AND DRINKING WORTHILY

1 Corinthians 11:27-34

Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 11:23-34.

Intro: This morning we are observing the Lord's Supper, and

I trust that I have discerned the mind of the Lord when I say that He has led me to speak on this passage which we usually read at every Communion Service, and the passage which just two weeks ago at our evening service Dr. John Custis spoke, using the subject, The Broken Body, A Penal Substitute. He brought out very clearly the meaning of the death of Christ as portrayed for us in the bread of the Communion Service.

This morning I would like to look at another aspect of what Paul wrote in these verses as he stated it especially in verses 27 and 29. Here he was dealing with the manner in which we observe the Lord's Supper. He indicated that it is possible for us to have the right elements, the bread and the fruit of the vine, and even to understand the meaning of the Lord's Supper, and yet to observe it in such a way that it would have to be described as unworthy, or observing the Lord's Supper "unworthily."

Actually this had been going on in the Corinthian church, and so Paul wrote in verse 30,

For this cause many are weak and sickly
among you, and many sleep.

Paul was not saying that all sickness is due to the fact that people have displeased the Lord, nor are all deaths to be explained that way. But he was saying that that was true at that time in Corinth. There were "many" on the sick list, and there had been "many" funerals because the saints had been eating the bread and drinking from the communion cup "unworthily," that is, in an unworthy manner.

This means that the way in which they were observing the Lord's Supper did not correspond with the importance of the Lord's Supper. Although in the Lord's Supper we are dealing with symbols--the bread representing the body of our Lord, and the grape juice in the cup representing the shed blood of our Lord--yet the meaning of the Supper is of such tremendous importance that our personal preparation for this, and the manner in which we observe the Supper, either contributes or detracts from the meaning of the message.

When we observe the Lord's Supper we are conveying a message to everyone present, and perhaps even to the angels of heaven. And just as that message must never be altered in

any way when it is preached from the pulpit, or given in personal testimony, so it must not be made less than it is by the manner in which we observe the Lord's Supper.

So we must always seek to eat and drink at the Lord's table worthily, never "unworthily." It must always be in a worthy manner, never in an unworthy manner.

This means, as Paul indicated in verse 28 that each one of us should "examine himself," or herself, "and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup." We are to examine ourselves to make sure that we are prepared to eat and drink at the Lord's Table!

I am afraid that self-examination is very rare today among those of us who know the Lord. It was rare in the early church or you would not have had so many cases of sickness and death traceable to the Lord's Table. The observance of the Lord's Supper is to be preceded by a time in everyone's life when things that are not right are made right so that the observance of the Lord's Supper can be a time of great blessing for everyone, a time of powerful testimony to any present who are not believers, and, what is most important of all, a time when our Savior is given the glory which He so richly deserves. At the Lord's Table we are remembering a death, the death of none other than God's beloved Son, a death more terrible than any other death, and yet a death with the most glorious of all consequences. Therefore, it is a most important time, a time when the church is to be sanctified and brought back to the very heart of our relationship with God.

Now, as we examine ourselves, the object is to make as sure as we possibly can that things are right in our hearts before God. We can deceive ourselves, and we can deceive each other, but we cannot deceive God. He knows whether we are ready, or not ready.

When Solomon prayed at the dedication of the Temple, and he spoke of many of the sins of which the Israelites could be guilty, he recognized this important fact: that God not only knows the hearts of all men, but He is really the only One Who does! And so he called upon God to

...render unto every man according unto all his way,
whose heart thou knowest:
(for thou only knowest the hearts
of the children of men:)

That they may fear thee, to walk in thy ways....

(2 Chron. 6:30b, 31a).

So the big question as we come to the Lord's Table is this:

What is the condition of our hearts spiritually? Are they the way the Lord wants them to be? Are we approved in God's sight to remember the Lord's death today by taking part in this service? Do we pass His test?

Let me see if I can help you to understand what this all means. But before I do, let me call your attention once again to verse 28:

But let a man examine himself,
and so let him eat of that bread,
and drink of that cup.

He did not say that we are to examine ourselves and then refrain from eating and drinking, or get up and walk out! We are to examine ourselves, get whatever is wrong cleared up, and then partake of the Lord's Supper. I am firmly convinced that it is just as wrong to avoid eating and drinking as it is to eat and drink when things are not right! The purpose of self-examination is to have God's approval. If we don't have His approval the consequences can be very serious whichever way we may fail. Let me say it again: One of the purposes of the Lord's Supper is to get things right that may be wrong so that God can be glorified, and we can be blessed.

Now let us conduct an examination. Remember that we are to examine ourselves, not someone else. Here are at least some of the tests.

I. THE TEST OF SALVATION.

This is implied in the text. Paul was writing to "the church of God...at Corinth" (1 Cor. 1:2). He was writing to people who had repented of their sins and had believed in the Lord Jesus Christ for their salvation.

But, in the early church as also today, it is possible for people to attend church, and to do it regularly, who have never been saved from their sins. The Lord never intended that the Lord's Supper, that the Communion Service, should become a ritual to soothe the consciences of unregenerate hearts. This is a time when believers, by their participation in the Lord's Supper, are declaring their faith in Christ as their Savior. Anyone who has not been saved, who has not been born again, who does not have eternal life, cannot possibly eat and drink worthily before God.

You may profess to be a Christian, but do you really know that you are? Do you know how to examine yourself in this? Can you say that you are really trusting Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins? Is your life different now from what it used to be? During this past

week have you been reading the Word of God, praying, and seeking to obey the Word of God in your daily life? Do you really love to be with the Lord's people? Have you ever told anyone that Jesus Christ is your Savior?

I am not asking you today if you go to church, or belong to a church, even Trinity Bible Church; I am asking you if Jesus Christ is your Savior. Do you know that if you were to die today, you would go to heaven? Or do you just hope you would?

If you are not sure, then make sure right now. Right where you are you can put your faith in Christ, trusting in what He did on the Cross for your salvation. He died for sinners, "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Don't partake of the Lord's Supper unless you know and can see the evidence in your life that Christ is your Savior.

But now let me address myself to those of you who know the Lord as Savior.

II. EATING AND DRINKING WORTHILY.

Paul said in verse 27 that the person who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner "shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." That is a most solemn charge, and I do not know that I know all that he had in mind, but let me tell you what I think it means--and there are several commentators who hold this view, such as Charles Hodge and G. G. Findlay in The Expositor's Greek Testament.

Paul is not saying that they would have participated in the crucifixion of Christ. Nor was he saying that they would be guilty like those who did participate in His crucifixion. He was seeking to show how holy, how sacred, is our time at the Lord's Table! And that we cannot desecrate the Table without desecrating the sacrifice which the Table represents!

Both Hodge and Findlay use the same illustration which we ought to appreciate in these days when we have those in our country who will burn the flag of the United States of America. Findlay states it this way:

To outrage the emblem is to outrage its original
--as if one should mock at the Queen's picture or
at his country's flag (II, 882).

Hodge stated it this way:

The man who tramples on the flag of his country, insults his country; and he who treats with indignity the representative of a sovereign, thereby offends the sovereign himself. In like manner, he who treats the symbols of Christ's body and blood irreverently is guilty of irreverence toward Christ (p. 230).

To do all of this is invite the judgment of God, not the loss of salvation, but sickness, or death, or any other judgment the Lord might choose to exercise against us as His people.

Therefore, how can we eat and drink worthily?

A. By observing it sacredly.

The purpose of the death of Christ was to cleanse us from our sins and to deliver us from the power of sin. How inconsistent it is with what we profess as Christians if we come to the Lord's Table while we are knowingly involved in some sin which has not been confessed and forsaken!

Is there anyone here involved in immorality? Is anyone here who is being dishonest in school, or in business, or in any relationship at home? Husbands and wives, are we sinning against God because we refuse to obey what the Lord has told us to do? Is there anyone here who cheated on his income tax this year--or any other year--and has not made it right? Have we been guilty of disobeying God in any way, even failing to do what we know He wants us to do?

Coming to the Lord's Table it is important that we get everything that is out of order back in order before our all-knowing God.

But let me mention another thing:

B. By observing it seriously, reverently. Cf. 1 Cor. 11:20-22.

We are not going to be guilty of frivolity in the same way that the Corinthians were. They made the Lord's Supper a part of their feasting where they were concerned about their fleshly appetites. But we can do the same if, when we come to the Lord's Table, we treat it lightly, perhaps making a joke with someone while the elements are being passed, or while we are eating and drinking.

Frivolity, joking, jesting, careless behavior, have no place at the Lord's Table. This is a most serious business, and it demands our total attention and reverence. We are not serving a light refreshment at the close of our morning service. We are partaking of that which speaks of Christ in His death.

Let me point out a third thing:

C. By observing it wisely, intelligently.

Notice the expression at the end of verse 29, "not discerning the Lord's body." What did Paul mean by this?

He meant that It behooves every Christian to be instructed in the meaning of the Lord's Supper—not just that it represents Christ's death, but how it represents His death! Every time we observe the Lord's Supper we should seek added light from Scripture, deeper understanding of the sacrifice of our Lord. The elements point us to Christ. They speak of His death. How much do you know about what our Lord was doing there, and what He accomplished when He died? You are responsible to know, and unless you do know you cannot eat and drink worthily.

We are doing this "in remembrance of me," our Lord said. Therefore, our thoughts need to be focused upon Him, not on what we are going to do this afternoon, or this week, but upon Him.

Let me give you two more ways in which to examine your heart.

D. By observing it harmoniously.

Look at what Paul said in verse 18. The church at Corinth was a divided church. They were divided between their leaders. Paul was saying that the Lord's Table is meant to be a place where the divisions that exist in a church, or between individuals in a church, need to be resolved. One of the greatest hindrances to the ministry of the church today is division within. As we come to the Lord's Table we need to correct our fellowship with God, but also our fellowship with each other. To ignore our divisions is to eat and drink "unworthily."

There is probably much more that can be said about what it means to eat and drink worthily, but let me just speak

of one more. It is found in verse 26.

E. By observing it purposefully.

I have mentioned many things today as reasons for the observance of the Lord's Supper. We are here to worship our Lord, to learn more of Him, to make sure that we are pleasing Him, to get things straightened out with each other, but I am thinking now of one purpose as far as the non-Christian is concerned.

Peter tells us to "be ready to give an answer to every man who asketh us a reason for the hope that is in" us "with meekness and fear" (1 Pet. 3:15). Have you ever had a person ask you what the Lord's Supper means? Or have you ever known of a person who was saved because of attending an observance of the Lord's Supper?

As we come together twice each month to observe the Lord's Supper it should be for the purpose, and with our prayers, that anyone in our service who is not a Christian might become a Christian because of the testimony that we give by eating and drinking worthily. It is not just what we say, but it is what we do, that the Spirit of God can use, and will use, to make non-Christians realize that they need Christ, too.

Concl: Now we cannot get all of the problems in our lives settled before we observe the Lord's Supper this morning. But we can get them settled in our hearts with the Lord. That is the main thing. And I believe we can and should go ahead and eat and drink having settled it with the Lord. But afterwards, if there are things that need to be made right as husbands and wives, or parents and children, or person to person, let us take care of those things. If you have some animosity in your heart toward some other person, but that person does not know anything about it, do not tell them! But ask the Lord for forgiveness, and ask Him to change your heart.

Tonight in the evening service we are going to be considering David's prayer at the end of Psalm 139. May that be our prayer this morning as we come to the Lord's Table to remember our Lord's death:

Search me, O God, and know my heart:
try me, and know my thoughts:
And see if there be any wicked way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting (Psa. 139:23, 24).