

WHY DO WE OBSERVE THE LORD'S SUPPER?  
1 Corinthians 11:17-34

Intro: Why do we observe the Lord's Supper? The first answer to that question has to be, Because the Lord ordained that we should observe. What other reason would He have had for instituting it with His disciples? He told them that it was to be observed in remembrance of Himself. Cf. Luke 22:19. When He told them this, He had not yet died, and so it is clear that it was for future use.

To add to the truth that the Lord's people were to observe the Lord's Supper regularly, our Lord said about Himself,  
But I say unto you,  
I will not henceforth drink of the fruit of the vine,  
until that day when I drink it new with you  
in my Father's kingdom (Matt. 26:29).

However, in addition to what we learn from the Gospels of Luke and Matthew, we have in our text for today some clear teaching about the Lord's Supper. Paul did not tell them that they were doing something that they should not be doing, but that some were observing it in the wrong way. What they needed to do was to correct what they were doing, but to continue observing it. Therefore, the question is not, Should we observe the Lord's Supper?, but Why? WHY DO WE OBSERVE THE LORD'S SUPPER?

And, as I have said, the first answer is that the Lord told us that we should.

To strengthen that answer, please note how the Apostle Paul learned about the Lord's Supper. Please look with me at the beginning of verse 23 here in 1 Corinthians 11. The Apostle Paul said this, as you can see in your Bible: "For I have received from the Lord that which also I delivered unto you ..." Peter could have told Paul what went on in the Upper Room that night when the Lord instituted this Supper. Or Paul could have learned from any of the other apostles. But instead the Lord chose to tell Paul Himself.

This would do at least two things for Paul:

- 1) It would impress upon Paul's heart the importance of the Lord's Supper.
- 2) It would make sure that Paul had an accurate account of what the Lord's Supper was. So the truth of it would be forever preserved, as it is here in 1 Corinthians 11.

And so I hope that there is no question in anyone's mind but that we are doing the will of God this morning when we observe the Lord's Supper. This is only for those who are

truly the people of God. If you know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, this is a must for you. If you do not know the Lord Jesus in salvation, then you must not participate. Here at Trinity we leave it up to you parents to decide when your children are ready to take part in the Lord's Supper. That means that you are as certain as you can be that your child, or children, are trusting the Lord. You live with them, and so you are in the best position to know if your children are really saved. And so we leave their participation up to you.

Let me say a couple of more thing by way of introduction before we get into our text. One has to do with the frequency of our observance. That is, how often should we observe the Lord's Supper?

The only guidance we have on this is found in Paul's words at the beginning of verse 26: "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup..." The Lord left it up to each church as to how often the Supper should be observed. Some observe it every Sunday. Some do it once a month. Some, once a quarter. We observe it twice a month--usually the first Sunday morning, and the third Sunday evening. We usually observe it also at the conclusion of our day of prayer. Other churches may observe it at different times from those which I have mentioned. The point is that the Lord gave us liberty as to the times. I personally am of the opinion that it is not good for a church to go too long without observing the Lord's Supper. I am very happy with our system, and I know that the other elders are happy the way we do it, but I would hate for us to cut back to observe it less frequently.

We should also note that the Lord did not specify what time of day we should observe the Lord's Supper. Some churches have it every morning; others have it every evening. We have it one Sunday in the morning, and one Sunday in the evening. The reason we do it this way is to accommodate those in the evening who can't come in the morning, and vice versa.

The last introductory word I would give is that it seems that the Lord's Supper is to be observed as a ministry of the church. You will notice in our text a number of times when the Apostle Paul referred to their coming together. See verses 17 and 18.

I believe that the Lord intended that this sacred service should be under the oversight of the leaders of the church. In my earlier years I used to take the Lord's Supper to shut ins who were not able to attend the services of the church, but I don't do that anymore. Nor I do not feel that a Bible

Camp where you have people gathering from many churches, or from no churches, and administered by camp leaders, is a proper situation for the Lord's Supper. The exception would be when it is a camp where the people of a particular church are gathered together and are under the careful supervision of its leaders--the elders and the deacons.

But now let us get to our text.

Beyond these basic truths which I have been giving you, I want to call your attention to three words in our text upon which I want to spend the remainder of our time today. They tell us the purpose of the Lord's Supper. That is what I have in mind when I say, Why? What is the purpose of the Lord's Supper? Why are we going to eat bread and drink the grape juice?

To answer these questions I am going to call your attention to three words in our text:

- 1) "Remembrance" (vv. 24, 25).
- 2) "Shew" (v. 26).
- 3) "Examine" (v. 28).

To understand these words in their context is to understand the purpose for the observance of the Lord's Supper.

Let us consider now the first of these three words:

I. "REMEMBRANCE" (1 Cor. 11:24, 25).

Both in connection with the eating of the bread (which, you will notice, came first), and with the drinking of the cup, Paul said here that the Lord said, "This do in remembrance of me."

"Remembrance"! What does this suggest?

Well, as unbelievable as it might sound, the word suggests that it is possible for us to forget the Lord, or at least to lose sight of Him in our daily living, and even in the Lord's work. It is possible that we might come to church for other reasons than to have fellowship with the Lord, and learn of Him. Many people in our day have forgotten (if they ever knew) that the Lord is the Lord! We have lost sight of His Deity, of His majesty, of His wisdom, of His power, of His presence, of His love and care for us. It is even possible for us to teach and preach doctrine without preaching Christ.

I believe that it can be truly said that we are to observe the Lord's Supper so that our minds, our thoughts, our affections, will be brought back to focus upon the Lord Himself. "This do in remembrance of Me."

When the communion trays are being passed around, do you spend your time on who is doing what, and what man is going where to serve, or are your thoughts upon the Lord? This is why it is good for us to close our eyes, to shut out all possible distractions, and pray that the Lord will help us to think only about Him.

What about Him?

The bread and the cup, representing His body and blood, suggest that we are to think about the Lord as a Man, His humiliation His grace. And since the bread is broken and the grape juice is in a cup, we are to think about the terrible death which the Lord died, and why He died as He did.

This is a good time for us to meditate on certain passages of Scripture which speak of our Lord's death, and His resurrection. For example, Isa. 53; Rom. 5:8; 1 Cor. 15:3, 4; Gal. 3:13; 1 Pet. 2:24; 3:18, just to name a few.

There seems to be in this word the idea of remembering something, or someone, without being reminded by someone that we need to do this. That is, the Lord's Supper was so designed by the Lord that as we are participating, we suddenly are made to realize, undoubtedly by the Holy Spirit Himself, that we have forgotten the Lord, and that our hearts have grown cold toward Him. We may not have fallen into some grievous sin, but we have started in that direction. How very, very important it is for us to remember the Lord! And so the Lord's Supper is God's way of bringing our hearts and thoughts back to the Lord Jesus Christ!

This word is found in Heb. 10:3 where we read, speaking of the OT sacrifices for sin,

But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year.

It is different with the Lord's Supper. Every time we come to the communion table we are reminded that our sins are forgiven, are forgotten, are taken away! The Lord's Supper is designed to make us forever thankful that the Lord Jesus Christ has saved us. And yet we are continually reminded of the terrible price our Lord had to pay.

Remembering Christ strengthens our faith. Cf. Heb. 12:1, 2, "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about..." Remembering Christ gives us peace. Cf. Isa. 26:3, 4; Phil. 4:6, 7. Remembering Christ gives us joy. When the Lord Jesus showed His disciples His hands and His side, John recorded those wonderful words, "Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord" (John 20:20).

The elements in the Lord's Supper are meant to remind us that there is nothing more important that you and I have to do on any day than to remember the Lord, and keep remembering Him. The Lord's Supper brings us back to the heart of the Gospel, and it brings us back to the heart of daily living.

Much more could be said about this, but I must go on. The second word that I would call your attention to is:

II. "SHEW" (1 Cor. 11:26).

The word is spelled s-h-e-w in the KJV, but it is pronounced, show. But we are concerned this morning with what it means.

Sometimes you will hear people say, This is Communion Sunday. The pastor preaches, and then we observe the Lord's Supper."

Do you know that that is not a completely true statement. What we ought to say is that the pastor preaches his message, and then we preach as a congregation by observing the Lord's Supper.

That is what this word "shew" means. It means we are proclaiming a message, we are declaring something, we are making truth known. It is a message preached, not by what we say, but by what we do! We are publicly proclaiming the Lord's death until He comes! The Lord's Supper turns our attention to Christ, to His death, to His resurrection, and to His return.

That is why it is important for us to know why we observe the Lord's Supper.

Parents, have your children ever asked you about communion? Or has someone else asked you why we do what we do when we are observing the Lord's Supper? This is a picture of how we were all saved, if we are saved. We, according to John 6, have spiritually and genuinely eaten the flesh of the Son of man, and have drunk of His blood. Cf. John 6:53-57. When we are saved, Christ comes to live in us and through us. This is pictured again as we eat the bread and drink the cup from the communion table at the Lord's Supper.

And so what is our purpose in observing the Lord's Supper. We not only are coming to get our own eyes back on the Lord, but we are proclaiming the Gospel of the grace of God. To eat our Lord's flesh and to drink His blood is another way of saying that we have received Christ, we are believing in Him for our eternal salvation.

So this is a very, very important time for all of us who know

the Lord, and for any who are here without Christ. The Lord's Supper is a Gospel preaching service.

But I must hasten on to the third word:

III. "EXAMINE" (1 Cor. 11:28-31).

At the Lord's Table we sit as individuals before the Lord. The Lord sees each one of us, and He knows us better than we know ourselves. He knows what our condition is spiritually as we come to His Table. He knows what is right in our hearts, and He knows what is wrong, or what has been wrong. The Lord's Table is a place of self-examination and, wherever necessary, of confession--not to each other, but to the Lord.

The object of our self-examination is to bring everything in our lives into harmony with the will of God which He has revealed in His Word. And notice: we are not to examine ourselves, and find ourselves unworthy, and then refuse to eat. We are to examine ourselves, confess to God whatever is wrong to seek His cleansing through the blood of Christ, and then eat.

The translators of the Greek Version of the OT, commonly known as the Septuagint, used this same word which Paul used for "examine" when they translated Psa. 139 (138):23, 24. (Quote.) This ought to be our prayer at the Lord's Table, and every day between the times when we observe it! Paul was saying that we need to examine our own hearts, but to do it using the Word, and asking the Lord to point out to us all that is not pleasing to Him, all that is sinful in His sight. Then we seek His forgiveness, and praise Him for His cleansing through the blood of Christ.

And then we eat.

Concl: If we were to arrange these three words in the order in which we act upon them, the examination takes place first (and even can take place before we get here), getting our eyes on the Lord follows (because self-examination without looking to the Lord can only lead to despair), and then the preaching will follow with great power and blessing for all, and the greatest possible glory for the Lord.

Let me remind you that these were not Paul's ideas as to what it should mean to us to come to the Lord's Table. He was giving the Corinthian church (and us) what the Lord had told him about this sacred supper. The examination is not optional, something we can do or not do. It is a divine obligation which the Lord has placed upon all of us who know Him.

Likewise with the primary object of our being at the Lord's Table. We are here to remember Him, Who He is, and all that He has done for us--and all that He will continue to do until He comes. When these two things are observed by all of us, then the communion service can actually bring a message that God may be pleased to use for the salvation of sinners who are present, but not partaking, because they do not yet know the Lord.

The Lord's Table is to be a place of revival, of restoration, a place where we make things right with the Lord, a place where His blessing can be poured out upon us in a greater way. Most of all it is to be a place where God and Christ and the Holy Spirit are glorified when we as the people of God get our hearts right with the Lord so that we can go on our way to live for His glory.