

THE LORD'S SUPPER – A CONTINUING MEMORIAL
1 Corinthians 11:17-34

Intro: As most of you know, for many years, really from our beginning as a church, we have observed the Lord's Supper twice each month. In addition, we have observed the Lord's Supper at the end of our days of prayer, and usually on New Year's Eve. There may have been other times, but these have been the main ones.

We are not told in Scripture how often we should have the Lord's Supper. It is simply stated in 1 Corinthians 11:26, "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come." So each church is given the liberty of setting the frequency with which the Lord's Supper is to be observed.

However, as far as our church is concerned we have chosen to observe the Lord's Supper regularly twice each month.

Usually in the morning service I am giving a series on some part of the Bible, or upon some Biblical subject. I like to tie my message in with the Lord's Supper when I can, but it is usually on the third Sunday night of the month that our messages deal directly with the Lord's Supper. I rarely have that service. Different men in our church family speak on that night, and we have had some good instruction from them regarding different aspects of the Lord's Supper, what it actually means, who should participate, and what the consequences should be as far as our lives are concerned, that is, our personal relationship with the Lord.

Most of you don't get in on those services, and I am sorry about that. After Will's message last Sunday morning, I have been hoping that more of you would feel that it is important to be here both for Sunday School, and for our evening services, as well as Wednesday night. One hour a week for us to be with each other for the purpose of worshiping the Lord and for the ministry of the Word, is not very much, is it? I hope more of you will earnestly seek the Lord's will regarding this. You are missing blessings by not being here, and we are missing blessings because you are not here. Will reminded us last Sunday of Hebrews 10:25 which tells us this:

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

These are dreadful days in which we are living. The world does not encourage us to seek the Lord or to be with His people. But we are not to take our direction from the world; we are to live by the Word of God. And soon after the Lord went back to heaven, the Spirit of God began to draw God's people together in churches. That's what we are – a church, a group of the Lord's people He has brought together for the purposes of worship and fellowship, for prayer and witness to the world. The building we meet in is not the church; *we are the church, a people called out from the world to help each other as we live and serve the Lord in this world which desperately needs our Lord and Savior.* So give this your serious attention. We all are busy, perhaps too busy. But we need to be with the Lord, and we need to be with each other.

I have said all of that to explain why I believe the Lord has led me to speak about the Lord's Supper. We all need to be reminded every time we observe the Lord's Supper, why we observe it so that we can be sure that we are doing it the way our Lord intended that we should observe it. So, as Jerry Bridges mentioned that he was doing, following the examples of Paul and Peter, and even of the Lord Jesus, I am probably not going to be saying anything new today. Perhaps you have heard the statement, "if it's true, it's not new, and if it's new, it's not true." So we are going to this passage from which we read every first and third Sundays when we observe the Lord's Supper – 1 Corinthians 11.

Let me call your attention first to the name given to what we are going to do. It is called:

I. "THE LORD'S SUPPER."

You might be surprised to know that this title appears only once in all of Scripture. And it is in 1 Cor. 11:20. And it is not mentioned here by the Apostle Paul in a commendatory way. In fact, as was the case with most of 1 Corinthians, he was rebuking them! (Read 1 Cor. 11:20-22.)

Now it will help us to understand what he meant if we just spend a moment looking at that title, "the Lord's Supper." The word "supper," as all of us know, means that it was a meal, and even the main meal of the day which usually was eaten in the evening. When I was growing up in Tacoma, Washington, my folks called the three meals we had each day, breakfast, lunch, and dinner. But when I went south to school, many of the people there had their main meal at noon, and so they spoke of break-

fast, dinner, and supper. The Greek word for “supper” had particular emphasis on the evening meal, the time when the Lord established this that we are doing today.

But to call it, “the Lord’s Supper,” as the Apostle Paul did, meant that this Supper belonged to the Lord, and that He exercised the sole authority over it. He did not originally tell His disciples that occasionally He wanted them to get together for dinner in His honor. That is the way a lot of people treat the Bible. Instead of seeking to learn how the Lord wants us to conduct our services, and why, they think that they can serve the Lord and do His work anyone they please. Nothing could be farther from the truth, and especially concerning the Lord’s Supper. In fact, you and I have heard of a lot of different kinds of food that can be used to make a supper, *but you have never heard of a supper like “the Lord’s Supper,” except in the Bible.* Actually we really wouldn’t call this a “supper,” would we? When we think of dinner, or supper, we think of meal, and vegetables, a salad, and then desert, with coffee or tea.

Now originally they had one loaf of unleavened bread, and a cup which contained the juice of the grape vine – and that was all! Obviously the purpose was not to satisfy their physical needs, but it was to minister to their spiritual needs.

Instead of keeping it simple like the Lord gave it, the believers in Corinth had mixed it with eating their own supper, and some had apparently even gotten drunk at the Lord’s table. It is unbelievable that they would do such a thing, but that is what they were doing. Expositors have differed in trying to explain what was going on, as though this were some kind of a love feast, but all we know is what the Apostle Paul said here – and what they were doing was really bad. But how bad?

Let me skip over for the moment what Paul said in describing what the Lord’s Supper should be, and go down to where Paul described what had happened to those who had desecrated the simplicity of the Lord’s Supper by turning it into a time of gluttonous revelry.

II. THE JUDGMENT OF GOD UPON CERTAIN CORINTHIAN BELIEVERS (1 Cor. 11:27-32).

This is a very solemn passage of Scripture. (Read it.) It hardly needs any explanation. Look especially at verse 30. There were members of the

church in Corinth who were physically ill, and some chronically ill, and still others who had died because of the way they had desecrated the Lord's Supper.

Now without in any way minimizing what had happened in Corinth, let me say that I personally have never known of a case in all my years of ministry, where someone got sick, or even died, because they had desecrated the Lord's Supper. But that had happened in Corinth! And it ought to make us think of the sacredness of the Lord's Supper.

Look at verse 27. Barnes, in his commentary, made a point that is very important for all of us to understand. The word "unworthily" in the Greek is an adverb, not an adjective. If it were an adjective, it would point to the worthiness of the one taking the Lord's Supper. But we are all unworthy of it, and so we would all be excluded if that were the meaning. Being an adverb it points to the manner, or way, in which the Lord's Supper is observed. That is what some of the Corinthian were doing, like those who took it as an opportunity of bringing their own food and gorging themselves instead of limiting themselves to the Supper the Lord had established with it very solemn meaning. Taking the bread and the cup was meant by our Lord to bring us back to meditating on His death. If we are frivolous about it, we are acting like those who scorned the Lord as He was crucified and dying on the Cross. It is hard for me to think that a true believer could ever do such a thing. But we need to heed the warning.

How are we to prepare for observing the Lord's supper?

Paul used two words to describe what we should do: examine ourselves (v. 28), and "judge ourselves" (p. 31-32).

To examine yourself is to put yourself to the test to make sure that your heart is right before God. And it is to deal with anything that is wrong so that you can go ahead to eat the bread and drink the cup. Pray a prayer like Psa. 19:14, and like Psa. 139:23 and 24. We ought to be doing this constantly. We can't participate in the Lord's Supper if there is anything wrong between us and the Lord, or between us and some other person. As we come to the Lord's Supper we need to conduct a clearing house for sin.

To judge ourselves is to distinguish between what is pleasing to the Lord,

and what is not! We put ourselves on trial, and we confess and forsake that which we know is not pleasing to the Lord. We can go ahead and eat the bread and drink the cup, but if there is something that needs to be cleared up with someone else, do it as quickly as you can. Sometimes we have a bad attitude toward someone else, but that person may not know anything about it. There is no need to tell them. We need to confess the sin to the Lord, and ask Him to help us to change. It is our heart that needs cleansing.

So when we come to the Lord's Supper there are two persons we need to be thinking about: ourselves, and the Lord.

Now let us go back in our text to:

III. THE APOSTLE PAUL'S DESCRIPTION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER (1 Cor. 11:23-26).

Paul could have learned about the Lord's Supper from any of the other apostles, but it was so extremely important to the Lord Jesus, that the Lord Jesus told Paul Himself what He had done the very night of His betrayal.

The Supper consisted of just two elements: bread and wine.

As the Lord explained the bread represented His body. He was still in His body, and so it could not have been that the bread was transformed into His body, nor even that His body was spiritually present in the bread, but it was all symbolic. The bread represented His Body.

He said that the juice in the cup represented His blood, His shed blood, and so His death. The Lord Jesus was truly Man as well as truly God. The grape juice, or wine, did not become the Lord's blood. His blood was still in His body. It was a symbol of His blood. It represented the blood of our Savior. It was by our Lord's death and the shedding of His blood that the new covenant was established. Although the Jews and the Romans had condemned Him to die as the worst of criminals, yet His body was broken for those who would believe in Him, and His blood was shed as an offering for believers. Therefore, the Lord's Supper is only to be observe by those who are trusting in Christ for their salvation. And in coming to the Lord's Supper we are brought back to the basic truth of the Gospel, that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures.

And so when we observe the Lord's Supper, it is to be a time of self-examination, confession, and cleansing for us as believers in Christ, but our focus is to be upon remembering Him.

How long we to do this? The people of God have been observing this Supper, the Lord's Supper, His Supper over which He has sole authority, for over 2,000 years, and it will continue to be observed "till He come."

But why do we eat the bread and drink from the cup. Because this pictures how we were saved. When you read 1 Cor. 11 from now on, always remember and think about John chapter 6 where our Lord said the following:

53 Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you.

54 Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.

55 For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed.

56 He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him.

57 As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me.

58 This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever (John 6:53-58).

Concl: Let me give one final word before I pray, then we will sing a hymn, and observe the Lord's Supper together.

Will you look again at verse 26? Notice the word "show." It is spelled s-h-e-w in the KJV, but it is pronounced like our word s-h-o-w. Do you know what it means? It is the Greek verb, καταγγέλλω. It is used 18 times in the NT, and is translated *preached, declared, teach*, and we could translate it "proclaimed." And it is a present, active, indicative, second person plural, so it means that as we observe the Lord's Supper we are at that very moment preaching the Gospel. That is why nothing must ever be added to the Supper because Christ alone has done all that God required to put away our sin and to save us forever!

"Shew" means to preach, to declare, to proclaim. Sometimes we preach by words we speak, sometimes we preach by the lives we live, and sometimes (as we are about to do), we preach the Gospel when we observe the Lord's Supper.