

1Corinthians 11:23-28 "Eating at the Table of Unity"

1CO 11:23-26 "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." 26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

This is a passage we're all familiar with as each month we come to the Lord's Table to celebrate the redemption we have from our sin through the death and resurrection of our Savior, Jesus Christ.

But in the context of this letter Paul is also teaching the Corinthians and us that the unity of the Spirit within the body of Christ is shown very clearly in this most awesome time of communion with our Lord and with every other member of the local church in which we find ourselves.

And I guess the irony here in this letter is that despite the fact that the Lord's supper is meant to illustrate this unity, that is not what was happening in Corinth as sin, division, favoritism, ill feelings toward others were taking place, with no apparent end in sight of reconciling these things, so that the work of Christ's kingdom in the gospel could go forward.

Paul's heart's desire was to see people come to Christ as they were delivered from the penalty and power of their sins and brought into a living relationship with the Creator and God who desires to have fellowship with us. That's what he just got through telling them earlier in this very letter.

1CO 10:32-33 "Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God 33 even as I try to please everybody in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved."

And so, even in his teaching here on the Lord's Supper it is still with an eye on being a faithful witness to the lost with the gospel of Jesus Christ, which is seen clearly in the supper, which the Lord Jesus Himself instituted and which the Lord gave to Paul.

1CO 11:23 "For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you:..."

Paul received this from Jesus Christ Himself. Remember, that Paul was not in the upper room the night Jesus was betrayed. And so, he had to learn this from someone else.

There are those commentators who believe that Paul received this instruction from the Lord via the other apostles. And this is certainly possible, in the same way you or I might say, "I received from the Lord as I was instructed from the word of God one Sunday morning."

But we also know that there were things which the apostles did not teach Paul prior to Jesus Himself instructing Paul. His conversion is an example of this. It was Jesus Himself who came to Paul and instructed him concerning the things of the salvation we have in Him alone.

And so, it is certainly possible that when Paul says, that "I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you", he could very well have received this instruction directly from Jesus Christ Himself.

And of course the context makes it clear that this was something Paul had received from the Lord long before he went to Corinth because the implication is that Paul had already passed this on to the Corinthian church when he was with them the first time. He's simply reminding them of what he had taught and what they should have known.

And in reminding them of what Jesus Christ accomplished on the cross for them this should have sent arrows to their hearts in acting the way they were, in light of how the Lord's Supper was a reminder of how their sin was washed away in the blood of Christ. "Why continue in such sin if we have been made new creatures in Christ?", is Paul's intent.

What the Lord delivered to Paul was what took place that night before the crucifixion.

1CO 11:23-25 "..... The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, <sup>24</sup> 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." <sup>25</sup> 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."

Imagine being in that upper room thinking that you're about to celebrate the Passover festivities which are taking place all that week. And now, instead of a festive atmosphere, Jesus takes part of the meal and uses it to teach the disciples about His death, which is about to take place shortly.

This by the way, is not the first time they had been introduced to the idea that Jesus was to be delivered up to death. It was shortly after our Lord had fed the multitudes with five loaves and two fish that He asked His disciples who the crowds thought He was.

LUK 9:19 They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, that one of the prophets of long ago has come back to life."

And then Jesus asked His disciples, "who do you say I am?"; and of course Peter chimes right in, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." It was after this that Jesus began to teach them about what was to shortly take place with His death and resurrection.

MAT 16:21 "From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life."

And then we read:

MAT 16:22-23 "Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. "Never, Lord!" he said. "This shall never happen to you!" 23 Jesus turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."

And so, when we come to the last supper Jesus is simply repeating what He had been teaching them about this event which is now upon Him. And so, Paul reminds the Corinthians what he had done with them so many times in their presence, when they partook of the Lord's Supper.

1CO 11:23-24 "..... 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."

By the way, the disciples knew that Jesus was not talking about some form of cannibalism. They never believed that the bread somehow was now literally His flesh. He had not died yet, He was

still in His body. They knew the bread was a symbol for His body which would be broken for them which is a figure of speech known as metaphor.

But, just as the Passover meal, which Israel was commanded to celebrate every year, so as not to forget that they had been delivered by the Lord from Egypt, we too are instructed to celebrate the Lord's Supper so as not to forget that we have been delivered from the bondage of sin. "Do this in remembrance of Me."

For the believer this is not a suggestion but a command to be observed in the love in which it was given. And so, every believer must partake, but as we'll see in our text it was to be taken in gratitude which demonstrated itself with a life of love and obedience to our Lord.

This was certainly lacking in Corinth and yet Paul does not tell them to put off celebrating the Lord's Supper, but rather encourages them to take it with a humbleness that shows itself in lives of considering others rather than themselves.

Also, when Jesus commanded His disciples to "do this in remembrance of Me", there was much more being conveyed here than merely recollecting events in their minds that took place. As John MacArthur points out in his commentary on 1 Corinthians, "For the Hebrew to remember [was] to go back in one's mind and recapture as much of the reality and significance of an event or experience as one possibly can.....

.... To remember Jesus Christ and His sacrifice on the cross is to relive with Him His life, agony, suffering, and death as much as is humanly possible."

This is not to suggest that we can actually relive the event as though we could transport ourselves back in time with some new age thinking, but rather as we consider the reality of what did happen we reflect on it and accept it as a personal act done on our behalf with the results of Christ's death and resurrection accomplishing our salvation.

And so, this time of reflection is not an empty spiritual exercise. It is a time in which Jesus commands us to focus our attention on Himself and to never forget what it was that enables sinners to be reconciled and brought into a peace relationship with the Father.

And so, when we take the bread we have a reference point which, in a sense, takes us to that first supper, in our minds eyes, some 2,000 years ago, and then puts us at the cross of Calvary, knowing that we were on the heart of Jesus who took our sins that day and nailed them to the cross and then cried out, it is finished.

This was an act of love given for us. And in that time where Jesus instituted this supper as a memorial He gave thanks to the Father that He could be a part of the Father's plan to redeem a people for Himself.

We see this just before our Lord broke the bread at which time He gave thanks to the Father. Yes, that certainly included thanks for the life sustaining provisions our heavenly Father bestows on us, but more importantly, He gave thanks that He was part of bringing a people back into a right relationship as they receive this gift by faith; this gift which cost Jesus Christ His life.

The same is seen in the wine or the cup which our Lord offers to His disciples.

1CO 11:25 "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."

This cup symbolized a breaking from the Old covenant and establishing the fulfillment of that covenant. The Old Covenant was one in which Israel was given the law and the shadows which all pointed to our Savior. The New Covenant was to be established, not on the blood of bulls and goats, but in the blood of the God/man who gave His life as a ransom for men.

This by the way, is not to suggest that the body or flesh of Christ represented in the bread was not also the establishment of the New Covenant, it was just used to illustrate that it would be the body of Christ Himself who would be establishing it. And so, the body and blood of Christ are sacrificed on the cross for our sin, as the New covenant is established, just as the prophets foretold.

**Jeremiah 31:31-33** <sup>31</sup> "Behold, days are coming," declares the LORD, "when *I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah*, <sup>32</sup> not like the covenant which I made with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, although I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. <sup>33</sup> "But this is the covenant which I will make with the house of Israel

after those days," declares the LORD, "I will put My law within them and on their heart I will write it; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.

Notice with whom the new covenant is made; the house of Israel and Judah. Jeremiah is making it clear that whoever is a recipient of the new covenant will be identified with the Israel of God. And we know who that Israel is.

**Galatians 3:7-8** <sup>7</sup> Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. <sup>8</sup> The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, *saying*, "ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU."

To be a son of Abraham is to be a son of faith in the promises of this new covenant that points directly to the one who would fulfill that covenant in His blood for Jew and Gentile.

ISA 53:5, 10 "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. 10 Yet it was the LORD'S will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand."

Isaiah proclaims here that though our Lord Jesus died in our place to take our guilt he will see his offspring. In other words, this crushed Savior will live again as we see in His resurrection from the dead three days later.

David tells us this in psalm 16, which is a Messianic prophecy concerning the resurrection of Christ.

PSA 16:9-10 "Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, 10 because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay."

This was the message Paul gave to the church in Rome.

ROM 6:9 "For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him."

But to celebrate the Lord's Supper is not to just have an eye on the past, as important as that event was and is. We are also to celebrate our futures in Christ. And so, we are to celebrate this supper with thankfulness until the risen living Christ comes back for us.

This too the prophets of old spoke of as the Lord gave Daniel, for example, a glimpse into the second return of Christ.

DAN 7:13-14 "In my vision at night I looked, and there before me was one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. He approached the Ancient of Days and was led into his presence. 14 He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; all peoples, nations and men of every language worshiped him. ***His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away, and his kingdom is one that will never be destroyed.***"

Jesus Christ is coming back for us and one day we will rule and reign on the earth with Him when God's plan for this present earth is over and this world will be destroyed as the Lord recreates it into the new heavens and new earth in which we will be with our Lord forever.

The Lord's supper is designed to direct our eyes to the past when Christ died for our sins, to the present as we live in the reality of that forgiveness and reconciliation, and to the future when Jesus will most certainly return.

When we celebrate the Lord's Supper we proclaim our Savior unashamedly. We proclaim that we belong to Him and to no other. We proclaim our allegiance and love to our new Master and Lord. And we proclaim the family of God for whom He died and to which we belong.

But we also proclaim Christ's faithfulness. He was faithful to come the first time to fulfill everything the Old Testament spoke of. He came at just the right time. And if He was faithful to fulfill those things, is He not faithful to be with us today? But, He is also faithful to come back for us and take us to Himself.

When we study church history we find that the believers "of the second half of the first century celebrated communion and then prayed, Maranatha (Come, O Lord)." (Simon J. Kistemaker quoting Didache)

This was the cry of the church that looked to the promise of Christ's return of which the apostle John spoke.

REV 22:20 "He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus."

This is what we celebrate; the hope of what this salvation is all about, which was accomplished for us in Christ some 2,000 years ago. It is His faithfulness we celebrate.

If we celebrate His faithfulness and His love for us and His desire to have fellowship with us, then why would we not celebrate the fact that we all belong to Him in Christ as we declare His love to the world as the family of God?

This is what Paul is addressing in this letter to the Corinthians. They were not acting like the family of God and yet they were coming together as they essentially went through the motions of the Lord's Supper and yet in their very actions they denied such a spirit of unity as a family which was purchased by the blood of Christ.

1CO 11:27 "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."

It would certainly appear that these Corinthian believers were eating and drinking the bread and the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner. And by the way, it should be pointed out that the Lord's Supper is not meant for just anyone to partake in.

It is an exclusive meal in the sense that only God's people are to partake. And there's a very good reason for this. When we take the elements of bread and the cup as the church we are saying amen to the redemptive work Christ accomplished on the cross for us. We are saying we have received Christ's sacrifice on our behalf by faith.

We believe that what He accomplished on the cross for us is real and that only as we embrace Him by faith will we have eternal life. To deny any aspect of this salvation found in Christ alone and yet to take of the elements of the Lord's Supper is to prove a contradiction.

Can you imagine an atheist proclaiming God is dead, and yet taking the Lord's Supper? He's sending two entirely different messages. By his words he denies Christ, but by his actions he's saying he's united to Christ. Which is it?

The same is true of anyone who has not embraced Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The table of the Lord is not meant for such people; not because we don't want them to be saved or that we



don't want them to participate, but because they mock the Lord by proclaiming they belong to Him when in fact they don't.

This is one way in which someone can take the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner, which is why Paul says to examine oneself before coming to the table.

1CO 11:28 "A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup."

Now, Paul has a couple of things in mind here when he speaks of examining ourselves before we eat the bread and drink the cup as it relates to taking the Lord's supper in an unworthy manner.

One would certainly include the idea of examining yourself to see if you actually belong to Christ by faith. If you desire to be identified with Jesus Christ and His atoning sacrifice on the cross, then you must confess your sin and throw yourself on the mercy of our Lord for forgiveness, giving up any hope of trying to attain salvation on your own good works.

Paul touches on this when writing to these same Corinthians in his second letter.

2CO 13:5 "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you -unless, of course, you fail the test?"

How can anyone fail the test? If they have been given the truth of the gospel and they have denied it by not receiving salvation on Christ's terms alone. We cannot come to God and say, I'll receive you as Savior, but not as Lord. I'll receive you if I can continue in my sin. I'll receive you along with adding to your gospel some things I felt you left out.

Paul defines the gospel about as simply as anyone could in this very letter.

1CO 15:1-4 "Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. 2 By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. 3 For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,..."

It doesn't get much simpler than that. This is what the gospel is. But simply knowing the facts doesn't save anyone. The demons know the facts and believe them to be true, but they are not saved, nor can they be.

What we must do with the facts of the gospel is given again very simply by the One who should know what we must do with such a glorious salvation, and that is Jesus Himself.

MAR 1:15 "The time has come," he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!"

To repent is to turn around from going in a direction which took us further from God. It is a turning from our own way and turning to the only way of salvation. But now, that we have turned around we must now embrace the truth of the gospel by faith. We must believe that what Jesus accomplished He accomplished personally for me.

There may very well have been unbelievers in the Corinthian church as there are unbelievers in churches around the world today. Many of them will profess with their mouths Jesus as Lord, but they've never truly repented in their hearts of their sin and embraced by faith this risen Jesus who is fully God and fully man.

And yet, there may be true believers who have truly repented at one time and embraced by faith the Lord Jesus Christ and yet for whatever reasons have slid back into a fleshly, worldly attitude. And for these people Paul would say examine yourselves so that you don't receive the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner.

Examine yourselves to see if you have strayed and are representing the Lord in an unworthy manner. Now, someone might say, don't we all stray in one way or another, and don't we all get off the path of faith to one degree or another and not faithfully represent the Lord in ways we should?

And the answer is yes. And this is the point of what the Lord is trying to convey to the Corinthians and us. Our lives should constantly be scrutinized against what we have received by faith and what we actually do with that faith and the gift of salvation in Christ.

But, in the case of the Lord's Supper, the ones who are to do the scrutinizing are the individuals themselves. Isn't that what Paul says in our text? A man must examine himself. Granted, there will be times in which those in the body may need to bring things

to the attention of other believers, but if each individual is faithful to consider his own walk with the Lord and measure that against the word of God and then walk by faith in obedience to the word, there would be no reason for any kind of discipline from the Lord.

We all are to be making the kinds of choices which would show forth the gift of life we've been given in Christ as is demonstrated in the Lord's Supper. In the case of the Corinthians, where they were being divisive, the Lord encourages the ones who are promoting divisiveness, to reconcile and then come to the table.

If there are those, as in Corinth, who are sinning without a repentant attitude, then they must come to the Lord and deal with the problem and then come to the table of the Lord. If there are those, as in Corinth, who are mistreating others without a repentant attitude, then they must repent of such behavior before coming to the table.

Some of these things can be done as we sit during a worship service. Other things can be done after a service. But the only thing that should keep us from the table is an unrepentant attitude. If we belong to the Lord, then the table of the Lord is meant to be a time where we seek grace and receive grace as we cheerfully acknowledge the atoning sacrifice of Christ on our behalf. Is that not what Calvary is all about; forgiveness and reconciliation?

Next week we'll see how taking the Lord's Supper in an unrepentant attitude will bring God's discipline to bear on those He loves.

But simply because we've sinned during the week or month does not mean we cannot partake of the Lord's Supper. Each month we come to this table and in between those times we should always be examining ourselves in light of the Scriptures and the love Christ has shown us.

It's God's way of helping us to stay on track as we are compelled to look at the cross in the Lord's Supper and come with thankful hearts to His throne and show that thankfulness with lives of love and obedience in repentance as we serve Him with grateful hearts.

This is a time to get it right with Christ, not a time to turn people away. It's a time to encourage the unbeliever to repent of his sin and turn to Christ's atoning work on the cross, not a time to push them away.

If you know the Lord and your heart is one which wants to please the Lord in all things and you're willing to take the steps to turn away from anything which would dishonor the Lord, then this table is for you.

Come and enjoy the salvation Jesus Christ extends. And may we, in expectation, say come Lord Jesus as we celebrate this supper until the Lord returns.