

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

Introduction

This morning we will finish our three part series on the Lord's Supper. It has been my desire that this series has shown you that the Lord's Supper is not mere religious ritual. Participating in the Lord's Supper is an honor given to us by God and it has deep implications for our lives. It is not just about here and now, but it concerns God's love and His grace and our eternity.

In the last few weeks I have taught on four biblical meanings of the Lord's Supper and told you we will cover two more this morning. In review, the first meaning of the Lord's Supper is to proclaim the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is found in verse 26 of 1 Corinthians chapter 11, **“For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”** The second meaning is that the Lord's Supper brings remembrance of Christ and the price He paid that we might enjoy salvation and a relationship with God. We see this in verses 24 and 25, **“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 also he took the cup, after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’”** The third is that the Lord's Supper is to be a spiritual feasting by faith of all that God is and His revelation through Christ. This is clear in John's record of Jesus saying, **“I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.”** (John 6:35) The fourth meaning is that as we partake in the Lord's Supper we savor the promises of the New Covenant as Paul wrote the words of

Jesus, “**This cup is the new covenant in my blood**” in verse 25. Jesus fulfilled the New Covenant as foretold in the Old Testament.

Before I move on and explore loving fellow Christians and our need for self-examination, I want to deal with a great question that has come up. It is an important question, so I want to take time now to address it. It has been asked about children partaking the Lord’s Supper and what is the right age? My response will be general in some aspects. When scripture is not clear on a specific question then there is room for what a right response is.

PARTAKING

Let me say, partaking of the Lord’s Supper at Canyon Bible is open to all, including children, who meet the following criteria.

- They have trusted Jesus Christ alone for the forgiveness of their sins and believe in Him as the Son of God.
- Who have committed to live holy before God, believing the Bible is the only revealed Word of God and desire to obey God’s commandments.

Children are welcome to participate in the Lord’s Supper when;

- They are able to understand the significance and meaning of the Lord’s Supper.
- They have the maturity to make a conscience decision to follow Jesus according to the scriptures.
- They can profess their faith in Christ.

Unlike baptism where I meet and evaluate a person’s readiness there is no class

on the Lord's Supper. The decision concerning children is left to the parents. This is where it should be. The father has the responsibility for the spiritual health of his family and he is held accountable before the Lord. I am always available if parents desire help in any spiritual aspects of their family life. However, this decision belongs to the parents. While our children wait to partake in the Lord's Supper it still should be a meaningful experience that grows in significance as they grow in their understanding and maturity. Parents should take opportunity to answer their questions and to teach them about the importance of the Lord's Supper in a Christian's life.

LOVING

Now we move onto my last two meanings I want us to consider in preparing our hearts for the partaking of the Lord's Supper. The first new meaning I want to add to the previous four is that the Lord's Supper calls each of us to love all children of Christ. The second is as a time for self-examination. Both of these meanings are found in 1 Corinthians chapter 11. I am not saying these are the only important concepts to understand concerning the Lord's Supper. They are the ones I chose to focus on.

I find it significant that Paul introduces the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians chapter 11 in support of his strong rebuke to the Corinth Christians unloving and sinful behavior. Most often the focus of chapter 11 is on verses 23 to 26, the administering of the Lord's Supper. Let's go back and read the setting in which Paul begins to speak as his foundation of the Lord's Supper. Reading beginning at 1 Corinthians 11:17, [“But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse.](#) These

believers are worst off by coming to church. Paul began addressing problems of internal strife within the church back in chapter 1, writing, “I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment. For it has been reported to me by Chloe’s people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers.” (1 Corinthians 1:10-11) Here in chapter 11 these problems are persisting, Paul continues in chapter 11, verse 18, “For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you.” Factions and divisions in the church are created by sin. This was true at the time of Paul’s writing and it is true today. However, Paul did see a good and divine purpose to this division. Paul moves on to speak of this purpose, “And I believe it in part, **19** for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized.” Divisions in the broad church and in an individual church let’s the authentic believers stand out and one can observe the separating of the sheep and the goats or true believers and the false. As Jesus said, “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.” (Matthew 25:31-32) Just because someone claims the title Christian does not mean they are. God knows a person’s heart. However, we can observe their behavior and lifestyle and how true it is to the scriptures. Our behavior in living out life reveals our heart.

The divisions Paul deals with in chapter 1 are different from what he addresses here in chapter 11, at least in one aspect. Here in chapter 11 we see there are economic divisions. Some within the church of Corinth are well off and others

have less. It appears that those well off are hostile toward their poorer brothers and sisters. Reading at verse 20, “When you come together, it is not the Lord’s supper that you eat. **21** For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk.” Believers were to gather as we read in the Acts of the Apostles, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” (Acts 2:42) But here in Corinth, the well to do, are eating finer food while the poor do with less or without. The privileged are even getting drunk when they should be gathering to share food, fellowship, the apostles’ teaching and prayer. This seems to be impossible behavior for a church. Yet it happened. This is why Paul is upset and shouts out in his writing, **22** “What! Do you not have houses 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 commend you in this? No, I will not.” (1 Corinthians 11:17-22) Believers should eat their meal at home before they come to partake in the Lord’s Supper. How dare people come to church and treat it as a party and with disrespect to God! How does one “despise the church of God?” These well to do people despised the church of God by thinking of themselves first and shaming the poor. They lacked servant’s hearts that considers others more worthy. We do not have this specific problem, but we can have some problems here in our church. For example, one problem is when we come into this multipurpose room and when we enter it, it becomes the sanctuary of our most holy God. We need to behave accordingly. We come here to “devote ourselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” It is important to have the right demeanor, dress, attitude and behavior in the House of God. This has been true from the beginning of the church until this day.

The church is the “body of Christ.” (1 Corinthians 12:27) The church is the bride of Christ. (Ephesians 5:25-27) The church is the dwelling place of God. (Ephesians 2:22) Paul is saying to some of these believers in Corinth that they come to church and eat and drink as if they are the center of the church. They treat the fellowship gathering as something that is not holy. Specifically their behavior shames the poor and also shames themselves and displays shame towards Christ. Their behavior makes others feel foolish. We are Christ’s church and we are to care for each other.

Let me clarify something here, the early church gathered to have fellowship meals, just like us. But in Corinth if you brought little food or food of lesser quality that is what you got. Meals were to be for fellowship and fellowship in sharing of food and of sharing the scriptures and serving each other. A fellowship meal is different than the Lord’s Supper in some ways and yet, like it in others.

When the believers gathered “[They were to devote themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.](#)” (Acts 2:42) This time of worship was often ended with the Lord’s Supper. Paul ends this correction of the church in Corinth with “[What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.](#)” Paul wants the church to behave with honor and respect, as they know they should. At this point Paul now introduces the Lord’s Supper with the word “for.” He is saying, “I will not commend you for this loveless behavior and for dishonoring Christ!” I will deliver to you what I have received from the Lord as a method of correction. By the Lord’s Supper you should know the church is meant to be proclaiming the gospel, remembering Christ as Lord, spiritually feasting by faith on all that God is by His revelation

through Christ, savoring the promises of the New Covenant and demonstrating your love for Christ and each other.

Now reading beginning in verse 23, “**For** (For these problems you have in your church and your lives) **For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed.**” The Lord’s Supper is not just empty ritual. It is a call to love and it is an indictment of those who are loveless. If you “**despise the church of God**”, you shame the poor. Paul is saying brothers, “Do you not realize in a short while you will partake of the bread and the cup? What are they to mean to each believer? Christ died for the church and the church includes the poor.” God calls us to love Him and if we love Him, we must love each other and this includes those with less social status, less money, the less spirituality - the poor.

EXAMINING

The second purpose bring added this morning of the Lord’s Supper is it calls us to examine ourselves. Intertwined in the Lord’s Supper is the condition of the believer’s heart. For the Lord to be honored and for the Supper to have spiritual meaning one needs to examine their heart. We saw that Paul introduced the Lord’s Supper after admonishing the people of the Corinth church for their sinful behavior. Then after clarifying the Lord’s Supper Paul returns to the moral and spiritual condition of the church, which is to say, the spiritual condition of those who are the church. Reading at verse 27, “**Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. 28 Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.**” Let me ask then, “What does it mean to eat the

bread or drink the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner? Examining the context of what we have studied I believe it means, first, failing to appreciate what the bread and cup symbolize. Christ loved the church and died for her. Second, failing to feel remorse, confess and repent of our sins is completely inconsistent with the love Christ demonstrated for us. Third, having confessed and repented, one is to strive not to return to these behaviors. To return to sin shows a lack of trust in Christ and His gift of the Holy Spirit. As Peter wrote, ²¹ “For it would have been better for them never to have known the way of righteousness than after knowing it to turn back from the holy commandment delivered to them. ²² What the true proverb says has happened to them: ‘The dog returns to its own vomit, and the sow, after washing herself, returns to wallow in the mire.’” (2 Peter 2:21-22)

To have been exposed to the true gospel and then turn away deadens one to truth and makes it harder to ever recover. This is the problem with those raised in the church that walk away from the truth of the Bible and for those who are taught in false religions to know half-truths, but they know not the true truth.

Fourth, if we fail to trust in Christ we will not receive His forgiveness and we will not be able to forgive others. When we accept forgiveness we experience Jesus’ love. When we experience Jesus’ love this enables us to walk through life with love in our heart for all and have peace in the midst of a world in turmoil.

The opposite of what Paul asks would be to ask, “What does it mean to eat the Lord’s Supper in a worthy manner? As we explore the answer to this question we each need to access ourselves. First, freely acknowledging there are no perfect saints, not even ourselves. We are all saved sinners, striving to sin less and honor God more. Just as God has shown His grace, we need to have grace with

ourselves and with others. In addition, fathers need to access the spiritual condition of their families and their children in order to protect them and grow their families spiritually. Being faithful to Christ is a guarantee of spiritual warfare. God admonishes fathers to know and teach. From the fifth book of Moses we find instruction to all but especially fathers, I read, “The LORD our God, the LORD is one. **5** You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might. **6** And these words that I command you today shall be on your heart. **7** You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when you lie down, and when you rise.” (Deuteronomy 6:4-7) To come to the feast table of Christ in a worthy manner is to see and savor what the bread and cup symbolize. You see yourself as a child of God by the sacrifice of Jesus. You see yourself as part of Jesus’ church. You are humbled by your salvation and feel remorse for being spiritually weak and sinning. You desire to live holy and bring honor and glory to Jesus in the living out of your life. You understand what Paul was instructing the church in Corinth, that we are to revere the church as precious, which means, we cherish both Christ and those whom He has saved. We are to honor and love others as Christ does. We understand that by being obedient we experience Jesus’ love, joy and peace.

If you believe these things then eat and drink at Jesus’ table. There are no perfect saints; we are all debtors to God’s grace. Forgiveness is our only hope. But, let’s be careful, let us not think forgiveness and grace means there is not discipline. Paul closes out this chapter with concerns of things that can cause believers to stumble and damage their relationship with Christ and fellow believers. Listen as I read verses 29 and 30 of our passage in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, “For anyone

who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. **30** That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.” This is a sobering thought. Where does this weakness, illness and death Paul writes of come from? These are God’s judgment, but they are NOT His condemnation. How can I say this? Let look at verse 32, “**But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.**” It is the Lord’s discipline preventing the world from condemning us. He disciplines us so we may not be condemned along with the world. As believers our weakness, illness and death are given by God’s grace. These are designed by our gracious heavenly Father to keep us from being condemned to hell with the rest of the world.

Paul made this clear in his letter to the believers in Rome; “**There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. ² For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death.**” (Romans 8:1-2) Yes, we all have lapses and there are many reasons. But, God knows where He is taking us – to heaven. It may be when tragedy comes into our lives it is the Lord’s way to save us from our setting a course that would surely shipwreck us on the reefs of sin of this world.

As I bring our study of the Lord’s Supper to a close I hope you have seen when we partake there are important aspects to take note of and understand; we proclaim the gospel and remember Christ and His sacrifices. We feast on all that God is for each of us in Jesus. Christ wants us to savor His fulfillment of the New Covenant promises. We are called to love Christ and our brothers and sisters who believe in Him. Finally, Christ calls us to examine ourselves, be mortified by our sin, repent

and receive the forgiveness of God through Jesus. The Lord's Supper is all about grace and mercy for those who believe in Christ Jesus.

God is sometimes tender and sometimes hard-hitting. God is sweet in our lives, but at other times He must be severe in order to correct us. God is always a God of love, grace and mercy – even in our correction. As parents we correct our own children because we desire them to grow up to be responsible adults and have a own strong relationship with Christ. So like, when we correct our children, God too corrects us to grow stronger. He wants us to be spiritually stronger in faith, grace, mercy and love.

Parents I call upon you to help your children understand the fullness of the Lord's Supper and when the time is right, bring them with you to partake in the Lord's Supper.

Now let us take a moment to examine ourselves, repent and accept the Lord's grace and mercy of forgiveness as we prepare to take the Lord's Supper. Let us ask ourselves, "What is the state of our heart towards Christ, His church and our brothers and sisters?" Let each of us and let us as His church accept the Lord's correction, His grace, His mercy and live – live for Christ!