

The Lord's Supper in Biblical Perspective
“The Lord's Supper: A Divine Call to Take a Look”
I Corinthians 11:17–34
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We will start by looking at I Corinthians 11 and then I'll share a few thoughts before we come to the Lord's Table. Let's look at these words of institution. I Corinthians 11:17–34 says [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. [18] For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. 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. [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. [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.*

[23] For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when 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 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.” [26] For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

[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. [29] 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. [31] But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. [32] But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

[33] So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another— [34] if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for judgment. About the other things I will give directions when I come.

The grass withers, the flower fades, God's Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

On a personal note, I really appreciate our elders allowing me a sabbatical each year to prepare sermons for our ministry focus for the year, to get some writing done and other things as well. It was a wonderful time of rest, renewal, study, praying and writing. The first part of my sabbatical was up in the mountains at a place called Seven Devils and that's where I go and meet the Lord. How do you like that name? The last part of my sabbatical I spent in my birth town of Charlotte, North Carolina. While I was there I took a jog over to the high school I went to and on the way I passed the elementary school I went to where I saved all the kids in my elementary school each day for I was on the safety patrol. I didn't lose a single kid the two years I was there doing safety patrol.

Captain Livingston from the Charlotte police department would come and train us. He told us we had to do three things – stop, look and listen. I actually believe, not to trivialize the Lord's Supper by any means, that is why the Lord has put the Table there for us. He doesn't tell us how often to do the Lord's Supper but the text says "as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup..." Notice it should be often. Now what is the purpose of the Lord's Supper?

It is a New Covenant meal that has been designed to enable us to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. Through this meal the Lord enables us to focus our lives on Him and that's the purpose of it. Stop. When I read this text it's telling me to look. It's not just telling me to look but it's telling me to look in five directions and then listen to our Savior from His Word to speak to our hearts. Stop, look and listen. That's why in the history of Presbyterianism there has always been that call to be intentional and don't just put the Lord's Supper into a service. God has designed this New Covenant meal to enable us to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. How can you come to this Table for the better?

I tried to emphasize when reading the text that it says five times 'when you come together...' When we go and take the Lord's Supper to those who can't make it to our services we have four, five or six elders and we have an assembly. This isn't a matter of private engagement. It is when God's people come together. The word that is used the most for 'church' in the Bible is the word ecclesia and it means the called together ones. When you take the noun of ecclesia and turn it into a verb it's translated 'when you come together.' The church comes together.

A man called me one time and asked to visit the church. He said "Where's your church?" I said "I don't know." He said "How can I visit a church when the preacher doesn't even know where it is?" I said, "Oh you're asking me 'where does the church meet?' and I can tell you that but I don't know where my church is for it's scattered everywhere. I can tell you where it's supposed to be on the Lord's Day when we come together." Do not forsake the assembling of yourselves together. The called together ones come together. As God leads us intentionally we come to the Lord's Supper and we stop, look and listen. I want to give you five directions to look in this study.

The first way to look as you come to the Table is to stop and look backwards. Look back 2,000 years to Christ on the cross. I love our Christmas season when we celebrate the virgin birth of Christ and when we celebrate the resurrection, ascension and glorious truths of Christ and His coming again, but they are meaningless without the cross. Why was Jesus born? It was to go to the cross. Why is the resurrection glorious? It is because it is the declaration that on the cross He won the victory over His and our enemies, defeated sin, death, hell and the grave. Therefore He is raised victorious and shall see the travail of His soul and be satisfied. I rejoice that He is coming again because all that He purchased on the cross will be delivered into a new heavens and a new earth.

The cross is the crux of history and that is where we get the word crux, from the Latin word for cross. It is the crux, the crucial moment of history where everything leads to it and everything revolves around it. It is the cross and when you look back there today it is right there that your Savior drank to the bottom the unendurable cup of God's wrath for your sins so that you today can drink the cup of eternal life that is unfathomable. That is what He did on that cross for you.

There is a phrase I never use for multiple reasons but I'll just give you one. I never use the phrase 'hell on earth.' Actually I'll give you two reasons why I don't use it. When someone is going through difficult times because of the brokenness of sin in this world to ever think that what we encounter here which is endurable, even compares with the unendurable torment of hell. The other reason is I believe there is one time in all of eternity that hell was on earth and it was at the cross. You can hear it in the cry of Jesus when He in Mark 15:34. It says [34] *And at the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?" which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"* There the unmixed wrath of God was poured out upon His Son, Jesus Christ for all the sins of all His people for all of eternity and He drank it to the bottom to give me a bottomless cup of life.

It is right there at that cross for one time in history you get an opportunity to see who we are apart from God's grace. For one time in history men and women had God where they could put their hands on Him and they crucified Him. That's the heart you and I were born with – Christ killing heart. But there you see the love of God meet the holiness of God to save sinners opposed to God by the grace of God for the glory of God. Oh what a Table we come to today! What a glorious Savior whom we look back to, our sure Hope, Christ our Redeemer.

Secondly, when you look backward now you can look inward. The text said not only to remember the body and blood of the Lord but examine yourself. Now you're free to look in and identify your sins. The Bible makes this glorious promise that if we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us of our sins. In other words, God can forgive your sins not by winking at them, but He can forgive them because Jesus paid for them. And He will cleanse us from all unrighteousness, if we confess.

Here is what we do with sin. You will always do one of two things with it. Recently I was talking with someone about some of the things that are happening in Washington from time to time and this person said "It's the cover-up that gets you in trouble. Why do they keep covering up? When will they learn?" My answer is 'never.' You will either cover up your sin or you will fess up, confess your sin. Adam covered up. You can hear the echo of many men, 'it's not me Lord, it's the woman.' The echo of a number of women is 'the devil made me do it.' When that doesn't work they go hide in trees to cover up or leaves and that doesn't work. All the cover-ups never work. We might say 'I'll resolve to do better.' That won't work for our righteousness is like filthy rags.

You can't cover up your sin but there is One who made an atonement for that sin. When you hear of Christ and you look backward that frees you up to look inward for you don't have to cover up anymore. You can be honest and say 'this is my sin' because I'm not going to heaven on how well I do. I do want to do well on the way to heaven for I would like Jesus to say to me "Well done, good and faithful servant" but it's not my well doing that is getting me to heaven. It is what He did perfectly at the cross and now that frees me up to own my sin and confess it. He is faithful and just to forgive it.

Thirdly, now you can look outward. Your brothers and sisters are all around you. You see different ages, different backgrounds, different this and that and yet we all have one Savior, one blood that saves us, one Spirit that indwells us, one Truth that guides us and leads us and we are united together in Jesus Christ. He says to maintain that unity by loving one another. So when I come to the Table and I have aught against my brother

I'm called to deal with that. The Bible says to discern the body rightly. What is my relationship with the body of Christ and the family of God? If I have aught against someone I need to forgive them. If they have aught against me then I need to go to them.

We need to be able to own our sins to one another. When we're reconciled to God we're now free to pursue reconciliation with each other. This Table tells us to look not only in but outward. We need to deal with our relationships because we have been called to this Table together, the called together ones. You can choose your friends but you can't choose your family. God gives you the family you're born into and He gives you the family you're born again into. They are His sons and daughters and we're sitting at the family Table. So we need to make sure we don't have aught against each other.

Eusebius the historian tells us about the Apostle John that before he died he was brought back to the church he pastored at, Ephesus and he was so weak that they carried him in on a cot. He was propped up by helping hands and he had enough breath to say three times "love one another." Jesus said "I command you to love one another for by this they will know that you are My disciples." It is by how you love one another.

Four, you are to look upward. It is so wonderful that you don't have to live life looking down. You can not only look back to the cross, in to confess sins, look out to strengthen our relationships redemptively by giving and asking for forgiveness but we can also look upward and praise God from whom all blessings flow. We have what we have not because we've got Jacob's ladder climbing up to heaven, but we have what we have because Jesus is Jacob's ladder that came down from heaven to bring us up to glory. So we have been saved to the praise of the glory of His grace that He has laid hold of us so we praise His Name.

The key to the Christian life is to make what we do when we come together, what we do when we separate from one another. Worship the Lord. *[1] I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. [2] Do not be conformed to this world, (Don't let this culture press you into its mold) but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.* (Romans 12:1-2)

Number five, look forward. I have great news, Christian. You don't have to live in nostalgia for your best days are ahead of you. He is coming again. Paul said, "I want you to observe this meal until He comes again." We look forward to Him coming and when He comes what a glorious day that will be. There are two times in my life as a pastor I really love. One is to share the Gospel at a wedding for no one comes to a wedding to hear the Gospel so I get to sneak up on them. Secondly I like to stand up in front with that groom in front of me and watch him as he sees that bride step out. That is a great moment when he sees her come out.

Because of the glory and majesty of God's grace that moment is coming when our Savior opens the doors of eternity and ushers His bride in. What a glorious day that will be and He is washing us today at the Table for that Day. He is washing us with His Word. He is washing us by His grace and mercy. I also enjoy funerals because again I get to sneak up on people to share the Gospel, although most people know I'm going to do it at a funeral. I also get to come down that row with a family whenever there is a believer that has gone to meet the Lord and I read that glorious text from Revelation 20 that says there is a new heavens with no death, pain or sorrow.

When Jesus comes back I get a deathless body. I will have no more temptation so I can do away with my accountability group. I will not see Him by faith but I will see Him by sight and this Table will become another Table, the Feast of the Lamb, where we sit with Him. Your best days are ahead of you.

So here is your takeaway. The world sits at its tables to eat and drink, trying to forget sin, its consequences and the judgment to come. We sit at the Lord's Table to remember our Savior who has freed us from our sin and we might rejoice at His coming. So stop, look and listen as you come together at His Table. Hear Him as He says "Come unto Me all of you that are weary and heavy laden. Come, I'll give you rest." Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You that we can come to this Your Table in these moments. Would You come and meet with us by Your grace and mercy? Come and lead us to the Table that we might eat, drink and remember the goodness and grace of our Lord. As my brothers and sisters sit and receive the elements may they look backward to the body and blood of Christ for there is there Redeemer, may they look inward examining themselves and freely confessing their sins to You, may they look outward so that relationships in the body of Christ be strong and sure as we love one another and may they look upward to praise God from whom all blessings flow. Then Father we look forward. Come quickly Lord Jesus for I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.

Power Point

The Lord's Supper is the New Covenant meal designed to enable God's covenant people to grow in the grace and knowledge of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Five Looks to Come Together for the Better at the Lord's Supper

- I. Look Backward
- II. Look Inward
- III. Look Outward
- IV. Look Upward
- V. Look Forward