

The Lord's Supper in Biblical Perspective  
"The Lord's Supper and the Lord's People"  
I Corinthians 11:17–34  
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God's Word is true, inerrant, inspired, infallible and sufficient. Our God speaks and has spoken in His Word. We will be reading Paul's words concerning the Lord's Supper and the corrections that he was making at Corinth.

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.

We have a few minutes to prepare our hearts for the Lord's Table. There is an unmistakable clarity in God's Word as to the importance of the assembling on the Lord's Day for gathered worship. You see it in multiple passages how important it was in the discipling of believers that they build as a foundation in their life the assembling of God's people on the Lord's Day to gather for worship. For instance, it says it in Hebrews in the negative and the positive. Hebrews 10:25 says [25] *not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.* We are not to forsake the assembling of God's people but we are to do it all the more for the encouraging and stimulating of one another to love and good deeds for the Lord is coming soon.

So why is this gathering important? There are many reasons for this but I will give you two reasons why this is important. It is because of two interdependent priorities in the effective and joyful Christian life. One is what I call a theological priority and the other is a functional priority. We have heard the theological priority many times. Why did God make you, save you and why does His providence sustain you? The chief purpose (end) of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. Gathered worship gives vent to that purpose as to why God made us, saves us and sustains us. It certainly bears witness to a culture that we would prioritize the assembling of God's people to give praise to God on the Lord's Day when the world would prioritize anything and everything else in its idolatry.

There are multiple reasons why we should assemble but one of the basic reasons is we were made, saved and sustained to give praise to God therefore we assemble as a priority on the Lord's Day which is foundational to being able to live for the Lord, give Him praise and glory and enjoy Him forever every day of the week, but there is also a functional priority. That is, we need to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ our Lord. We need to grow functionally and daily. We live in a world in which we have indwelling sin within us and sin outside of us. Therefore we need to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ. Isn't it amazing that this assembling to give worship to God has been revealed to us in God's Word and exactly what we are to do when we assemble for worship? It is not up to our imagination to figure out each week what we're to do in this gathered worship for we know what we will do this week through God's Word.

Now there are two strains of thought in evangelical churches. One strain of thought is that when you gather for worship it certainly ought to be about Jesus but you can do in worship, anything, unless it is forbidden in God's Word. That strain or principle of gathered worship is one you'll see in many churches that every Sunday is 'what can we think of next that will get the people and keep them entertained?' The other strain is one that comes to us all the way from the Apostles through the Reformation and the Great Awakening and that is when God's people assemble to worship a Triune God of Glory they can only do what God commands. It's not that you can do anything you want to unless I forbid it but it's we only do what God commands.

God doesn't tell us how long a sermon is to be but we are to have the preaching of the Word. He doesn't tell us how long a text we are to read but He says until I come give attention to the public reading and teaching of the Scriptures. Why do we give God's tithes and offerings? It is because God said on the first day of the week bring what you have set aside in stewardship. Why do we sing songs, hymns and spiritual songs to the praise of God and to encourage one another? It is because God said to do this. Why is it that we have confession of sin? Why is it we have confession of truth, and the preaching and teaching of the Word? It is because God has divinely designed the very elements of gathered worship. It is not up to our imagination. We worship God in Spirit and in truth. God's Word is truth and He tells us what pleases Him.

He doesn't tell us where the sermon goes or where we receive the offering, how many songs we sing and which ones we do here or there during our gathered worship time, because He has given us all kinds of freedoms in the circumstances of worship. But He has already told us that we have gathered to give Him praise and He tells us in His Word what gives Him pleasure. So we give praise to God with those elements from our soul that give Him pleasure and that is what thrills our soul. It's about God and His glory and not us and in fact that is our joy that it is about Him.

So these divinely designed elements include the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. They are there for two reasons. One, these elements give to us the means whereby

God's redeemed people can give praise and worship to God that is acceptable to Him. The very first sin in humanity originates out of false worship where Abel brought that which is true and Cain brought that which is false. Worship is the foundation and the capstone. Gathered worship is absolutely crucial for the life of Christianity in general, the life of the church and the life of every Christian. It is the means whereby God takes pleasure. When I walk away from a worship service, I am not to play the self-centered 'Siskel and Ebert,' the self-centered critic, where we criticize the music, the choir, the sermon, the pastor etc. We are to look to the Lord and not was I pleased but was God pleased with our worship. God has told us in His Word what pleases Him. It is when it comes from our heart.

There is a second reason why God has designed these elements. The second reason is for God through these means to minister His grace to His redeemed people. God ministers the grace of the Lord Jesus and the Gospel of grace to us through these means when they are properly implemented by God's people, including the sacraments. Where do the sacraments bring us to? Baptism is the declaration of the death of Christ to sin and the resurrection of Christ to life. That is not giving the mode of baptism but that is giving the theology of baptism. Baptism is a glorious representation of Christ's death and resurrection to life.

What about the Lord's Supper? When you come to the Table it is not an a la carte menu. God has prescribed the menu. It is a simple but profound feast. It is the bread and the fruit of the vine. It is the body and the blood. Then in case we have missed it, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. The Table is not consumed with the Virgin birth although it assumes it. The Table is not focused on the resurrection although it assumes it. You proclaim the Lord's death until He comes again but how can He come again if He is still dead? The Table assumes His resurrection, His ascension, His second coming, the Virgin birth but the fixed point is that you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes and as you engage in this you are giving the Lord praise that gives pleasure to Him. He not only designed it for you to give Him praise which is your joy, but He designed it to come and minister to you.

Why is this design to minister to us this way? I want to give you two simple thoughts before we go to the Table. Why in the preaching of the Word do we go to the glorious atoning death of Christ – the Word of the cross? Why in prayer do we plead the merits of the atoning death of Christ? Why in the singing do we rejoice, 'hallelujah what a Savior, Jesus what a friend for sinners, ruined sinners at the cross to reclaim' do we keep going to the cross? Why does all of this bring us to the cross? That is our focus but we are to do it frequently.

Paul says he received this from the Lord. Perhaps he received this when he was caught up to the third heavens but we don't know when he actually received this from the Lord. Maybe it was when he was in the wilderness that we learn about in Galatians 1. Then he tells the church at Corinth that here is an instrument that God has designed to give Him praise and to be an asset to you but when you celebrate it, it is for the worse and not for the better. He gives three reasons for this.

One reason is because when they came together they were not focused on Jesus but on their factions and the people they are following. The second reason he says is they come and flaunt what they have in front of those who don't have and they humiliate them at a meal. Thirdly, they don't come in a manner worthy. They are not worthy but it's not their worthiness but the manner they come in needs to be worthy – examining themselves in their relationship to Him and their relationship to each other.

God wants us to have this for the better. In other words, God has not only designed it for us to praise Him in it but God has designed it to do something in our lives. God has designed

it to grow us. So why the preaching, reading, singing and praying of the Word? Why the symbolic presentation of the Word in the sacraments and the Lord's Supper? Why does God keep bringing us back to the cross? There are two reasons.

One reason is some whom God has saved are sensitive to sin and its sinfulness. You are also sensitive to your faults, shortcomings and your failures in your Christian life. I rejoice over you. You recognize the indwelling and entangling sin within you and you're sensitive to it. God put this Table here for you to bring you back to the cross and remind you that you're not saved because of how well do. You are saved because of what Jesus did for you at the cross. What you do matters before Him but it does not merit your salvation. Go to the cross and that sin that you are sensitive to has been canceled by God's Son, Jesus Christ. There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus because Jesus paid the debt in His atoning death at the cross when His body received those sins and bore them to the cross. His blood was shed as the agony of His soul was poured out and He paid for all of your sins for all of eternity.

Your sensitivity to sin helps you realize that sin is no play thing and that it is nothing to trifle with. You are also sensitive to the fact that you're not making the progress you want to and in fact you are sometimes regressing. I don't want to take you to a Nike commercial that says 'just do it' but I want to take you to the cross where Jesus did it for you. I want you to go back to when God's Son was there on the cross because that is where God sent His judgment and He has liberated you from sin's guilt and shame. People who are sensitive to sin in their life can become discouraged and then they will be candidates to be deceived so they need to get back to the cross to help them get delivered from this, but there is another reason to get back to the cross.

There is another reason we go back to the atoning death of Christ in worship. Assuming the resurrection, the second coming and the virgin birth but back to the Gospel Word of the cross, some of God's people because of their discouragement or because of bad teaching have become insensitive to their sin and the sinfulness of sin. In other words, there are some who teach that God's grace is so great that if you become convicted of your sin, sensitive to sin and its sinfulness then you're not really believing in the Gospel of grace. Actually the more you sin the more grace you get so why worry about sin for it's all paid for, isn't it? He wants to take us back to the cross if we have become entrapped in this deceitful teaching so that we are now insensitive to sin, its sinfulness and the lack of progress in our life, to show us what He had to do at the cross to set us free from that sin, what He did to pay for our sins. So how can we trifle with sin and call it confidence and grace?

So this Table we come to that proclaims the Lord's death, in it remember the depth and the breadth of our sin and the sinfulness of sin. Our sin is so deep and so wide and so sinful that God the Father was required to give His Son on the cross for us and there was no other way to save us. That is the depravity of sin. Sin is so heinous that it required the Father to send His Son into the world and to the cross. Then that Father poured out upon His Son the torments of condemnation, judgment and hell on that cross at Calvary. O the depth of sin! It cost the Father His Son. It cost His Son the cry of agony, 'My God, My God, why has Thou forsaken Me?' It cost God the agony of pouring into the unendurable cup of torment, all the judgment due for all the sins of all of His people for all of eternity and He tipped the cup and held it to His Son until the last drop was drunk.

How can I possibly trifle with sin or how can I possibly be insensitive to it? How can I possibly sign peace treaties with sin in my life? The Table reminds us of the breadth and the depth of our sin and its depravity but praise the Lord that the Table sends us to the cross. There

we see the depth, the breadth, the height and length of God's love for us. Oh the Love that will not let us go! It is the relentless, unmerited, unwanted, and unstoppable love of God in Christ for us. How great is our sin but how great is God's love so freely poured out upon us. How great is the sinfulness of sin but how glorious and great is the relentless love of God in Christ for us.

Go back to the cross for there is where you were saved. Go back to the cross and see the sinfulness of sin. Go back to the cross and see the height, breadth, depth and length of the unstoppable love of God in Christ, brought to you with the Gospel message and the Spirit of God. Now He sets a Table to tell you that He loves you – I have set you free from sin's guilt and power. As you partake of the cup and the bread my heart's cry before God is that He will bathe you with a hatred of sin but a love of Christ whose unstoppable love saves us for now and in all eternity. There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, would You come and minister to Your people in these few moments? Prepare our hearts as we come to this Table to see what a great Savior we have, not by diminishing the sinfulness of sin but by extolling the greatness of Your love and grace. So Father, send us to the Table. Holy Spirit, use this Your Word and the Table to send Your people to Christ, to rejoice in their redemption, to be renewed in their commitment, to annihilate sin in our lives and to exalt Christ, the Lover of our soul, Jesus the Friend of sinners. Hallelujah, what a Savior, Amen!