

The Lord's Supper in Biblical Perspective
"Thanksgiving and the Lord's Supper"
I Corinthians 11:17–34
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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.

I want to say a word about this season of thanksgiving as we come to partake of the Lord's Supper. We are in that frame where we don't put the Lord's Supper at the end of each service but we do have it ten times a year and we take the entire service to focus on the Lord's Supper with songs, hymns, confessions and sermons so that we can come as the text says – in a manner worthy. There is one element of that, that I want you to think about as we come to the Table.

I praise the Lord for this season of Thanksgiving. As a pastor, one of the things I long to do and wrestle with a lot is to try and help you develop some Biblically informed rhythms in your life with what God sets out for us with six days labor and one day rest and worship to be renewed. There are certain things that are glorious for us to make sure that are in our life, such as thanksgiving. I love this holiday for a number of reasons.

One reason I love Thanksgiving is that it is a very unique holiday. Its roots are fully developed in the context of this country and in the context of the Christians who were here in the

outset of settling the country. It insists in the virtue of thanksgiving as a way of life, not just a season, in the life of believers. In this study I'm glad we can do this before we come to the Lord's Supper, because it's also built into communion.

When you sit down to your Thanksgiving meal, I wonder for those who don't know the Lord or acknowledge the Lord who they will give thanks to. I read recently one man who said 'I just want to thank the (blank) out of my lucky stars.' Who are we giving thanks to and what does it look like? What is Thanksgiving? By the way, as you sit down to your Thanksgiving meal I would ask that you consider reading Psalm 100 as you sit down to eat. There are a number of texts for you to consider but build in this dynamic of thanksgiving.

This text we are looking at in this study is known as the text of institution. Paul has laid out for us an understanding of how to approach the Lord's Supper, what it is and how to participate in it. Like other texts in the Bible, this text arises because of a mal-practice in the church. They were misusing and blaspheming the Lord's Supper so much that God was having to bring the judgment of discipline to His people, not condemning judgment and we see this when the text says '*That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.*' This was because they were misusing the very instrument God had designed for our better.

In this study I want you to think about what you ought to be doing – how should you come to the Lord's Supper. Notice how Paul emphasizes to come not thinking that you are worthy to come but to come in a *manner* worthy. What does it mean to come in a manner worthy? Just one piece of it is thanksgiving. When Paul puts this together he identifies this as a family meal. Five times in this text Paul says 'when you come together.' It's a gathered family meal.

That's why we don't do a private administration of the Lord's Supper. I know of you are thinking 'what about those who can't get to church, the shut-ins?' The pastoral staff will recruit 5 or 6 people to come with us to go to these people and we'll have a small worship service there. It is a gathered assembly where the family of God is coming together. It's a family meal. Every time in the Gospel it records the giving and institution of this meal, which Paul picks up on – after giving thanks – thanksgiving in the context of this meal.

I want to give you some highlights as to how to think about thanksgiving Biblically. What does it look like to develop the Christian virtue of thanksgiving, not only at a season in life but to embed it in our lives as a marked virtue of God's grace? Here are five things to think about.

The first one is that thanksgiving is verbal. It may be written out or spoken out but it's verbal. I am a blessed man. I get so many encouraging notes from this congregation and these notes are just so well thought out. You all are amazing at this but excel still more. If you are just starting out in this just verbally begin to give thanks whether it's written or spoken. This leads me to number two.

Secondly, give thanks thoughtfully. Don't just be general in your 'thank you' but get specific. Do it thoughtfully and be specific about thanking someone for something. There was a lady in the church I pastored in Charlotte, North Carolina who was so adept at this. I asked her one day how she developed such an astounding way in her life to be thankful and encouraging and she said to me 'Everybody I know needs an 'at-a-boy' and they may not be doing it perfectly but they are in the game and at least need a pat on the back.

Then thirdly, you learn to give thanks pervasively. Paul says in Ephesians 1:16a, [16a] *I do not cease to give thanks for you...* It was a way of life for him. Here is what Paul said in I Thessalonians 5:18, [18] *give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ*

Jesus for you. I think it's important that Paul didn't say give thanks 'for' everything because there are some things that sin has brought that we don't thank the Lord for but even when those things come, in those moments we give thanks because our Lord is at work. Our Lord is at work in it, through it, above it and below it so that we can see, understand and trust Him.

There is another lady I talked with who is really amazing at this and what she said really affected me. She said 'Pastor, I have a notecard I carry with me and at the end of the day I want to have written down five names who I personally thanked for something they did that day that I met.' So at the end of the day when that notecard comes out she wants to see at least five people that she has personally thanked and yet she doesn't limit it to five but she wants to make sure that there are at least five written on that notecard.

The only thing that astounded me more than that was a lady I met who had a notecard in her car that says 'Let five people in ahead of you every day.' She is going to get sainthood in my categories but the point here is that it is intentional. To be verbal, thoughtful and pervasive you have to be intentional in thanksgiving. It is not serendipity.

Fourthly is that you want thanksgiving to come from a grateful heart. I love the song we sing that says 'give thanks with a grateful heart.' It comes from the heart with gratefulness. The reason I'm really getting at this is because I have a sub-objective that is at work here. I know that all of us are being raised in a culture that is driving home one message constantly – that is, you are entitled to be the center of life. You will never give thanks until you give up the spirit of entitlement. The spirit of entitlement says 'why give thank, for they should have done it, they ought to do it for me, I deserve it my way.'

We are constantly bombarded with communication in this culture that it is all about us yet we have a Savior who saves us and teaches us from Psalm 115:1, *[1] Not to us, O LORD, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!* We never live for His glory until we are grateful in our hearts for His grace as it shows up from Him and others. This brings me to number five.

Fifthly, be personal in thanksgiving with others and with the Lord. Who are the others? Be grateful verbally, thoughtfully, pervasively and personally to your spouse. Sometimes the more faithful our spouses are the more we take them for granted and say very little. How about expressing thanksgiving to your parents. I was so grateful for the relationship I had with my mom and dad but I would give anything to have them back just to tell them 'thank you' one more time. The sacrifices and commitments parents make are selfless. We should do this with extended family, friends, teammates and co-workers. We need to learn to enfold them with the word of thanksgiving and gratefulness. To express to friends that they don't exist just for your comfort level but that you're grateful to have them as a friend. True friendship is something to be prized and certainly ought to be encouraged.

We are also to be encouraging to the saints. Hebrews 10:24–25 says *[24] And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, [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.* Some will only meet together on the Lord's Day if they don't have something better to do and I'm not talking about providential hindrance or the ox in the ditch but I'm talking about throwing an ox in the ditch. There is this priority in our life where we can't wait to be with God's people because I can't wait to see some of them to encourage them as this text says. I don't know of something much more important than encouraging and stimulating one another than 'thank you.' In all the intersections of life where you run into others and you

can be thankful for then surprise someone by being thankful. They might even ask you why you do this and then you have just opened the door for lifestyle evangelism in that person's life.

We give thanks to the Lord with a grateful heart. When the Lord instituted His Supper He said to give thanks and here is where we start giving thanks. I love the Lord's Supper just to be able to hit pause and reflect on the many things we have to give thanks for. Here are a number of things you can give thanks for.

First, give thanks for your Savior. When I needed Him I didn't want Him but I praise God for the One that didn't need me wanted me and I want to give thanks for my Savior, my Redeemer. I want to give thanks to the Father for giving me His Son. I want to give thanks for the Son who has given me His Spirit.

Secondly, I want to give thanks for my salvation. I am forgiven. I was an ungodly, vulgar, profane, immoral, self-absorbed man and God's saving grace showed me I was helpless and hopeless. He gloriously didn't leave me in my helpless and hopeless state but showed me an all-sufficient Savior. Give thanks for saving faith. Do you believe in Jesus? The only reason you do is because He enabled you to. Ephesians 2:8-9 says [8] *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, [9] not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*

Give thanks for the Word of God. Do you have any idea of all the people that have died for us to have this Bible in our hands? Do you know what the Spirit of God has done to bring that Word throughout a 1600 year period and give it to us over the last 2000 years? Now it is here in our language. You can know the God of the Word accurately and intimately because you have the Word of God. We weren't entitled to that for that was a gift that was brought to us through the sacrifices of many. I not only have God's Word to read, study and think through but I get the privilege to preach it.

Give thanks for the Spirit of God who has been given to you and made you His own. There is going to come a time He isn't going to need this house (our body) no longer, as the song says because He will give you a new one.

Give thanks for the providence of God that God in a world that is broken works all things together for His glory and your good.

Give thanks to God for His church. Please love the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. Do not treat her as an off-scouring or as a convenient store for this the church of God with her sacred oaths, covenants and that glorious body of believers that is headed to eternity.

Give thanks to the Lord for worship. When my mother died I was away at a General Assembly meeting and I drove back here Saturday evening, preach the next Sunday and then went back for the funeral on Monday and one of these dear ladies in our church came up to me and said 'Pastor, I'm grateful that you came to preach this Sunday but you didn't have to do that. You could have stayed there and we would have understood.' I said 'I actually wish that was true in some ways but I didn't come back here out of duty to preach this Sunday. I came back here today because I couldn't think of anywhere else when my mother went home to be with Him, than with God's people to worship on the Lord's Day.' Thank God for worship in spirit and in truth. This isn't something that is warmed over as a worldly event with a few religious words but it is something unique that God has designed that pleases Him.

Here is one more. Thank God that Jesus is coming again and He is coming soon, maybe morning, maybe noon. As the glorious hymn, *I Know Not Why God's Wondrous Grace* says;

*I know not why God's wondrous grace
To me He hath made known,
Nor why, unworthy, Christ in love
Redeemed me for His own.*

Refrain:

*But "I know Whom I have believed,
And am persuaded that He is able
To keep that which I've committed
Unto Him against that day."*

II Timothy 1:12 says [12] ...*But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me.* Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, prepare our hearts for this Table that we can together as a family, not use this moment to exalt ourselves, but to use this moment to exalt our Savior drawing near to Him by faith and together, in the Lord and for the Lord as a grateful people. Give thanks to others and give thanks with praise to Him. I pray that You will come and meet with us in these moments, in Jesus' Name, Amen.