

The Lord's Supper in Biblical Perspective  
"The Lord's Supper and Giving Thanks"  
I Corinthians 11:17-34  
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To prepare for the Lord's Supper I think it's important to look at a couple of passages before we get to I Corinthians 11. I want to start with I Corinthians 1. Here Paul is at the church at Ephesus writing back to the church he pastored at for 18 months in which he will answer some questions they have for him. Those questions start in I Corinthians 7 and they can be spotted with the words starting with the phrase 'now concerning,' but before he addresses those questions he has something else that is on his heart because of some reports that have come to him that he wants to address first.

I Corinthians 1:10-12 says *[10] 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. [11] For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. [12] What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ."* So here he identifies an issue that he brings in the prologue and the introduction of the letter.

I Corinthians 3:1-3 says *[1] But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual (mature) people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. [2] I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, [3] for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way (a fallen way)?* It's not only a matter of unwarranted division, quarreling, gossiping and slandering that has penetrated the church, but now we see something else

I Corinthians 5:1-2 says *[1] It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. [2] And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you.*

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

I have two thoughts to share as we come to take a look at I Corinthians 11, starting at verse 17. One is, I have been greatly benefitting these last three months because my wife has been teaching in her Women of the Covenant class on the seven feasts in the Old Testament. As she would share with me things she was learning or ask me questions, she would share with me things I hadn't seen before and then we would explore some things. During this time, I kept being reminded as I thought of the seven feasts, the various fasts, burnt offerings, wave offerings, freewill offerings, etc., that all of this intricacy was pointing out that it is with difficulty that we are being saved and how all of that is fulfilled in Jesus. Everything is 'yes' and 'amen' in Christ.

Thankfully I am not a minister of the Old Covenant, but a minister of the New Covenant, where complexity has now been replaced by simplicity for we don't have seven feasts, we have one, the Lord's Supper, because all the others are fulfilled in Jesus Christ. We don't come sacrificing or bringing sacrifices because Jesus has once and for all paid it all. It thrills me to know all that but even then, there have come some challenges. Counting my student pastorate years, I have now entered my 50th year of pastoral ministry.

This past week with some help again from my wife who was a math major in college, I tried to figure up how many communion sermons I've done. We as a church embrace the reformed view of communion, not only theologically but in practice, which means because of the importance of communion, we don't just put it on to the end of a worship service each week, but we have special times during the year. I'm about to read a text that says 'For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup...' but it doesn't tell us specifically how often to partake of it. So historically the reformed church that is that which comes out the Reformation, has always had a communion season where we announce communion so that you can prepare and come in a manner worthy.

Now we're not worthy, only Jesus is, but we can come to the table in a manner worthy so that we're prepared for it and know when it will happen. We also utilize the whole service to revolve it around the moment we sit at the Table, including readings of Scripture, hymns that are sung and the sermon, because when we come to the Table we are partaking of Christ. These elements don't change into Him, but we are spiritually partaking of Christ by faith and faith comes from hearing the Word. Thus, the Word guides us there. So, I believe, if I'm not mistaken, give or take 20 to 30 communion sermons, I have preached somewhere between 520 and 550 communion sermons because I always preach on the subjects and texts that lead us into communion on those Sundays. Here at Briarwood, I'm somewhere between 220 and 240 where almost half of those sermons have been preached here.

I was so impacted in preparation over these last two or three weeks for this particular sermon coming to the Lord's Table that I saw something I had never seen before and it really impacted me personally. So, I thought I would share it with you in terms of the sermon that would lead us there from I Corinthians 11. I have preached on this text many times and from different avenues of what is in it, but there are two words in it I want to emphasize in this study. They are emphasized best by understanding the context.

Have you ever noticed how when error creeps into the church, through either apostasy or false teaching, that many times one of the blessings of God that comes through those occasions is He brings the church to address it, and once the church begins to confront the error and strengthen the doctrine of the church to be faithful to the Word of God, the result is a confession, a creed, or a couple of great hymns that deal with the issue. Take the Reformation, for what a glorious movement to correct the church in which comes the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Belgium Confession, and the old London Baptist Confession. Then we have the Apostles' Creed and the Nicene Creed.

In I Corinthians 11 we get the most definitive directions in the Scripture on what to do and how to celebrate the Lord's Supper. We actually call this the text of the institution. It is at this text that Paul lays out for us the theology, the purpose, the design and the architecture of the Lord's Supper. But he's doing so in the context of correcting an error that was so grievous in the church at Corinth that God was disciplining them because of the ungodly way they were doing the Lord's Supper. Paul is letting them know that the Lord's Supper here has become a means of discipline/judgment from God who is not going to let this supper be taken in vain, instead of a means of grace for those at the church of 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 (not condemning judgment). [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.*

It is interesting in this judgment from this text, Paul says 'This is why some are weak and sick and some have fallen asleep.' 'Fallen asleep' is the term he uses for the death of a believer, but yet the death was one of judgment and discipline in the life of the individual, because of how the Supper was being profaned. Out of this text we get this glorious doctrine for we now know that the Supper is there as a means of grace for our better, not for the worse. We also know it's for sinners saved by grace, because if Jesus has designed His Supper as an instrument for His people to grow in grace, then that tells us we don't have something provided to help us do better if we're already perfect. So clearly, we have sinners here who are saved by grace who are growing in grace, but what He won't countenance is profaning the Supper for one's own personal agendas.

He says there will be divisions in the church because not all in the church hold to the truth, but these are not divisions over truth, these are divisions over self and that's what Paul is correcting here. That's the reason I read the earlier passages in I Corinthians because those various texts show us some of the issues Paul is confronting in this church – division, quarrels, polarization, jealousy, envy, even sexual immorality had crept into the church at Corinth that was even more egregious than one would find in the surrounding sexual immorality of paganism. They were even allowing, without discipline, incest in the church. So, Paul comes with this very clear declaration of what's happening in this church and says, 'At best, you're babes in Christ, you got the world hanging all over you still, and this has to be addressed.'

Now the very things he identifies at work in the church, are now even manifested when they come for the Lord's Supper. I mentioned earlier we only have one feast and it's interesting to me that in the Scriptures, the book of Jude tells us that a name that started to be used about the communion season when people would get together around the Table in the church, was the Agape Feast. Agape is the word for sacrificial love that earmarks the significance of the love that's found among God's people in God's church. But Paul tells this church at Corinth that there is no Agape Feast here. It's self-serving, it's self-absorbed. The self-absorption that is being

evidenced in the lifestyle of the church has even shown up in the act of communion when they gather together to observe the Lord's Supper. As it is shown in that context, God's hand of discipline comes upon them and that's why some are weak and sick, but again it's not the condemning judgment that will come upon the world.

The Lord's Supper is a foundational provision of God to enhance, surround and bless the communion of the saints. Another phrase for communion of the saints is the culture of the redeemed, which ought to be so different that Jesus says it becomes an apologetic for the faith. It becomes evangelistic for the faith. The way we live that is celebrated at the Lord's Supper, encouraged by the Lord's Supper, is so different that the world will be amazed at *how* we love one another. Clearly, that's not what's happening here in this text. The Lord's Supper is an instrument to express our communion with Christ and each other and to instruct us about our grace bought communion with Christ.

One of my favorite hymns is For All the Saints and one of the verses are as follows;

***Oh, blest communion, fellowship divine!***

*We feebly struggle, they in glory shine;*

*Yet all are one in thee, for all are thine.*

*Alleluia! Alleluia!*

This is a fellowship that people have to say who are watching, unbelievers, God is in the midst of them a fellowship, divine, but all of those divisions, all of that immorality and all of that had not only been put into the life of the church, but had now penetrated the Lord's Supper itself.

Why had the Lord's Supper been polluted? The answer is obvious. It is because the communion of the Saints had been polluted. Why had the communion of the Saints been polluted? The answer is obvious. The culture of Corinth had now penetrated and permeated the culture of Christ's church at Corinth. The immorality that surrounded them was now in them. Now we all face this as believers, don't we? We want to be in the world but not of the world. What is true about the individual is true about the church. We want to be in the world. We're not going to go buy some property, put a fence around it, and go sit on a mountain until Jesus comes back. That's not the church.

The church is in the world, but not of the world. The church has a mission to take the Gospel to all the nations and we are to live it in the world, but we are different from the world, not because we are sequestered and segregated, but because of what it is that permeates and creates the culture of Christ's church. I want to give the cultural dynamic to you in another way but by doing this I am oversimplifying. I believe the culture of Christ's church that we celebrate at the Lord's Supper is built upon two dynamics and I say dynamic intentionally.

Number one is the dynamic of God's sovereign grace. We are the redeemed because of the Redeemer which means we are as the redeemed the recipients of God's grace to save us. We, as the redeemed, are the recipients of the soul saving, life changing grace of God as the people of God for the glory of God. Jesus paid it all. We are not the participants in our redemption but the recipients. We are the beneficiaries, but the benefactors. God the Father made us and authored our salvation. He ordained it before the foundation of the world. We bring nothing to the table except the problem. We do not merit what He has done. In love, He predestined us to adoption as sons (Ephesians 1:5). Secondly, He then sent His Son. We have a Trinitarian Gospel. The Father has authored it, the Son has accomplished it and then the risen Son sent the Spirit upon us to bring us to Himself. We have this, and we are recipients of the grace of our Triune God in our redemption.

The second dynamic is, if we, as the redeemed, are the recipients of the soul saving, life changing grace of God as the people of God for the glory of God from the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, praise God from whom all blessings flow, then the redeemed have a very clear response. Our response is thanksgiving, but you won't give thanks unless there is a heart of gratitude. Thanksgiving is the action of the attitude of gratitude. We may give thanks in a therapeutic way, but it is thanks from the heart to the praise of God. How do we know we have that kind of thanksgiving? Here are two thanksgivings.

One is we will never let anything other than providential hindrance keep us from the gathered worship of God. Five times it says in that I Corinthians 11 text, 'when you come together' not if you come together. It's the verb form of the noun for the church. We are the in the Greek, *sunagóge* – the coming together ones. Now, I praise God for the technology that allows us to minister to people who are shut in, providentially hindered that can't get here, but they will be the first ones to tell you, it's not the same as being here – when you come together, for the better out of thanks. Why do we worship? It's an act of thanksgiving and He is worthy.

The second dynamic of thanksgiving is obedience in the pursuit of holiness, not to add to salvation, but to give glory to the Savior out of thanksgiving. Thanksgiving is the recipients of God's grace for that is what we do, but thanksgiving is nourished from the soil of gratitude, and gratitude is the response of the love of Christ, because He first loved us. In other words, the redeemed response to the grace of God is thanksgiving that flows from gratitude, that is nourished by the love of Christ which compels us. So if one has been a recipient of grace, then they love Christ and when you love Christ, you are overwhelmed, amazed. That's why the great hymns of the faith are either Trinitarian or they talk about the word amazing – amazing love, amazing grace, how can it be or giving glory to the Triune God. That's what we see and love to sing, whether it's old, new or whatever – God centered praise to God because of who He is and what He has done. That's the response of the redeemed.

It's not about us for when He has saved us everything becomes about Him. Worship, obedience, our acts of thanksgiving, all flow from gratitude that are nourished by the love of Christ. This is the way I would say as I borrow from the imagery of the Book of Proverbs – it is the banquet table of God's grace. I can remember my mother on Thanksgiving had to get that centerpiece right. I believe the banquet table of God's grace which we will come to today and we have a glorious table to sit with Him in eternity – the Supper of the Lamb – the banquet table of God's grace has the centerpiece of the bowl of gratitude that's filled with the extravagant fruit of thanksgiving to God. That's what sets the table off. God is glorified through the fruit of thanksgiving, in the bowl of gratitude that has been set by the love of God in Jesus Christ and so we come together today.

As you look at that culture of Corinth that has slipped in and permeated the church - boy Satan is so subtle, so devious – I think of a quote by my friend Karl Truman. He said 'This present age is an age of ingratitude that is being lived by the arrogance of victimhood instead of the grace of triumphant in Christ.' We're all looking to be a victim of something or somebody instead of walking in the victory of Christ.

The Book of Revelation was written for us in these days. The whole theme throughout the entire book is the world is full of succubers, but to him, who overcomes will I give (Revelation 2:17). How are we overcomers? God's grace is greater than our sin (Romans 5:20). Instead of being those characterized by this world – polarization, gossip, slander, pollution, language, social media, corners – it is now found in Bible studies, gatherings for worship as this culture of ingratitude, with its victimhood, has invaded and is invading the evangelical church.

What is the answer? I think the answer is in two words from that I Corinthians 11 text. The answer is what Jesus did when He became your Victor. The bread and the cup that pointed to His body, that proclaimed His death, He **gave thanks**. It was after He gave the bread and the cup that He had given thanks. If our Lord has set this table and His foundational act was to give thanks that we who benefit from Him as declared in this table, that ought to be our life. Give thanks with a grateful heart. Give thanks to the Holy One. That's why the table brings us back to Him for in Christ we are in the Greek, *hupernikaó* – more than conquerors. We are not the succubers. We are the overcomers. Imperfect, yes, but overcomers by His grace to His glory. Let's pray.

Prayer:

God, thank You for the moments we could be together as we uncover the Table You have set with Your redeeming grace. God, lead us to that Table together as recipients of the grace of the Lord Jesus and let us, as the redeemed, give thanks from a heart of gratitude that is propelled out of the love of Christ, to love Christ to the glory of the Father, by the power of the Spirit led by Your Word, in Jesus' Name, Amen.