

PURSUING GRACE AT HIS TABLE

An exposition of 1 Corinthians 11:26-33
at West Hills Evergreen on June 24, 2018

INTRODUCTION: Have you ever done something without recognizing how serious the implications were for having done it until afterward? I did it, didn't think much about it, but then it turned out that the consequences were far more serious than anything I could have anticipated.

PROBLEM: The Lord's supper can be like that. We do it every week. We emphasize it. But most of us have probably not put much thought into how we ought to prepare our hearts for communion. But how we receive it can have profound implications for our lives...in positive or negative directions.

MAIN POINT: The Lord's Supper can bring grace or judgement, so prepare and pursue grace

SETTING THE CONTEXT: Please open your bibles to Paul's first letter to the church in Corinth, 1 Corinthians 11 and we will get to work. Last week, Jason Trapp opened this section of text by helping us get our head around what exactly was happening in 1st century Corinth that Paul is responding to in this section of text. Within the Corinthian church, there was a large spectrum of rich and poor people. When the church would gather for worship, the understanding was that everyone would bring their own food to eat and at some point in the middle of the meal or immediately afterward, they would take some of their own food and drink and someone would talk about the Eucharist or the Lord's supper and everyone would eat and drink from what they had brought.

The only problem was...a lot of the time, the poor families didn't have enough food and drink or barely had enough food to participate. And it wasn't just that the poor didn't have enough...it's that the rich had more than they needed and rather than sharing what they had...they would stuff themselves with their food or get drunk on their wine...while the poor looked on humiliated. And there are two things that are really important to understand about that. The first is that that behavior was standard Corinthian practice at a private banquet. Private banquets were a competitive social atmosphere in Corinthian society and that is fairly well attested in 1st century literature. The second thing to understand about that...is that coming to the Lord's supper that way...set's your heart in a place of fundamental opposition to what the Lord's Supper is about...namely the cross. Coming to the table with a heart of self-centeredness...is in direct contradiction to the cross of Christ which is fundamentally other centered.

And because both of these things are true...that this was how everyone else in Corinth treated banquets...and treating it that way is to invert the example you've been given in Christ...because both these things are true...Paul has issued his most scathing rebuke of the entire letter. But a rebuke without a heart that wants to help would not be apostolic. A rebuke that makes no attempt to bring healing and restoration would also be a denial of taking up ones cross and

following the example of Jesus. So now as we finish looking at chapter 11, we will consider how Paul taught the church to partake of the Lord's supper in a way that produces grace rather than judgement. That results in blessing rather than curses. This morning we will consider how Paul taught the church in this context...to repent and receive the sacrament of communion in a way that would bring blessing to the entire church. So having set up my text...let's now humble our minds and open our hearts for the reading of the Word of God. Beginning in 1 Corinthians 11:26

READING: [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.

PRAYER: Our Father who dwells in heaven...holy is your name. Your kingdom come and your will be done in the whole earth as it is in heaven. You taught us to pray this way...and you also taught us that if we seek we will find...if we knock it will be opened to us...we desire to see the values of your kingdom made manifest amongst us. We desire to see your precious presence manifest more and more amongst us...expressed through increasing repentance...increasing holiness...and the good fruit that comes through abiding in Jesus Christ. Bless the preaching of your word...I ask by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

ROAD MAP: 1.) What is the supper for? 2) How is the supper abused? 3.) How to partake in a worthy way, 4.) How to prepare your heart for the grace of communion

What is the supper for? (v. 26)

1. Fellowship, remembrance proclamation: Now I won't unpack all that has already been said about this. After all we have been focusing on the Lord's supper for 3 of the last 5 weeks and I am tremendously satisfied with having done so.
 1. **The first thing we pointed out in chapter 10 is that the Lord's supper is about fellowship with Christ Himself**, and that that is by far the most mysterious aspect of participating in this sacrament. Paul contrasted fellowship with Christ at the Lord's table with the danger of inadvertently sharing fellowship with a demon at a pagan altar. He tells the Corinthian church that they must not eat food from Pagan altars anymore because even though idols are nothing and idol meat is nothing...they may accidentally interact with a demon doing stuff like that. The Lord's supper is first about participating or sharing or fellowshipping with Christ.

2. **The second thing the supper is for is remembering.** As Jason pointed out last week, that remembering was never considered to be a simple intellectual exercise in Israel. The intellectual aspect was only part of it. To remember the Lord or forget the Lord described a persons way of life. So we celebrate this meal in remembrance of Jesus Christ as part of our new covenant way of life.
 1. We set our minds on these elements...we focus on the bread broken and the wine poured out and think about the gospel...that while we were yet sinners Christ died for us to reconcile us to God...and he has called all of us to and repent and receive grace...grace that is free and abundant...to turn from our sins and receive love vast as the ocean lovingkindness as a flood into our lives.
 2. And once that love has strengthened us to dry our repentant eyes and to strengthen our broken hearts we ask what would you have me do Lord? And His answer is... look at my gospel and imitate me. Look at my apostles and imitate them as they imitate me. Take up your cross and follow. That is the second thing the supper is for...remembering.
 3. But there is a third thing this supper is for in verse 26....it's for proclaiming Christ's death. After Paul reiterates what he had received from the Lord...he says "For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.
3. This proclamation is past, present and future...
 1. The first thing we do is proclaim the Lord's death. The Lord died. One of these days we need to travel up into the infinite and incomprehensible glories of the question: how can God die. But we won't do that today. This meal proclaims...it doesn't suggest...it announces with incontrovertible authority that something has happened that has changed the world. God became flesh and dwelt among us...and by the will of the Father for the glory of the Son...He was crucified by us as a sacrifice for our sins. He was crucified in our body, in our nature, in our place.
 1. And even if every man plugged their ears and blinded their own eyes for the rest of time...this sacrament would never cease to proclaim that reality any less boldly or beautifully for the glory of God.
 2. This practice goes back two thousand years to the upper room where it was received from the lips of Jesus Christ Himself. This supper proclaims that Jesus' body was broken and His blood was shed to open the way back to God for all who repent and believe. It's proclaims something that has passed.
 2. But it also proclaims something that is present. The Lord died for me...this body was not only broken it was broken for me...verse 24. The blood was not only shed but shed for me and these signs were given to me to take them in my hand, to hold them and consider them, and in receiving them into myself to let them nourish and strengthen my faith.
 1. This sacrament teaches me to come as my broken and weak self and to associate myself with all the glorious benefits of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
 2. I see in this broken bread and this poured out wine a symbol of the wound opened for my sins...all of my sins laid upon Christ on the cross...and by receiving Him

crucified for me...I pass under and out from God's wrath. God sees the blood of Christ covering my life, and His wrath passes over me. The way it did on the night of the first passover. This happened objectively, the first moment I put my faith in Jesus...and every time I participate in the Lord's supper I remember over and over again that it really is true.

3. But by receiving Christ crucified as my Lord...by receiving the One as King who took up His cross and laid down His life for me...I am saying I will follow by taking up my cross and laying my life down for Him. And this is really important.
 4. The problem in Corinth and the reason Paul is so mad is that when they participate in the Lord's supper they are doing the opposite of laying down their lives for others. The way they are eating does not proclaim as Lord the One who died...or to say that more simply they are being selfish rather than selfless (like Christ was) with how they think about the communion meal. The rich are stuffing themselves and getting drunk rather than laying down their preferences and their self-indulgence to bless and benefit others.
 5. The way we practice communion should proclaim the Lord's death...not our own self interest...
4. Finally, there is a future orientation to this proclamation as well...we do this verse 26 until He comes...
 1. It is not easy for anyone to have the gospel run directly in the face of your cultural assumptions. Our flesh doesn't like to be told we are wrong. But the way forward is to repent not to resist. And this is hard. Taking up our cross and following Jesus into death to ourselves and to our sins is painful. It means self-denial. It means embracing a way of life that requires us to put other people before ourselves...and this supper reminds us that it will not always be this way. Christ will come again and death and suffering and sorrow will be driven away with the old...Faith will give way to sight and prayer will give way to praise.
 2. We pick up our cross and follow until He comes. And the crosses are exchanged for crowns. Mourning is exchanged for singing...our dying is exchanged for life everlasting...and so we will forever be with the Lord.
 2. These are the things the supper is for...it's for fellowship, for remembering and for proclaiming. And it proclaims that Christ was definitively crucified in the past...that the benefits and obligations of that death are received by us in the present...and that we now walk with Him in hope that He is coming again to make all things new so that His glory will cover the earth the way the waters cover the sea. This is what the supper is for...this is how we are meant to think about it and use it....but in Corinth...that is NOT how it was being thought about and used. So let's now come to verse 27 and ask ourselves how this supper was being abused...and I'd like to ask your forgiveness ahead of time...I'm going to jump around the text a little bit for the sake of presenting this material in an organized way.

How is the supper abused? (v. 27, 29-34)

1. Well verse 27: You can receive it in an unworthy way incurring judgement on yourself.
“Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord.
1. There are two words that are extremely important to understand in this verse. The first is the word unworthy. The greek word we translate as unworthy refers to doing something in a way that does not square with the character or the nature of what it is you are doing. So for instance to talk about hell while laughing...that would be to talk about hell in a way that does not square with the character and the nature of what you are talking about.
2. So Paul’s indictment here is that if you participate in the Lord’s supper in a way that is not taking seriously what it means and what the implications are for your life...you are doing it in an unworthy way. And if you do this Paul says you are guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. That word guilty in Greek is a judicial word that means liable. We become chargeable for Christ’s death.
3. Now we need to think about what Paul is saying here because he is going to tell us in a minute in verse 32 that Christians who have abused this sacrament aren’t judged in the sense that they are condemned to hell, but rather disciplined that they might be saved. So what could he mean by saying that those who participate in an unworthy manner will be liable concerning the body and blood of Jesus?
4. Would you mind flipping with me back to chapter 2 for a moment. When we were going through chapter 2 last year we came to this profound section of text in verses 6-8. Paul explained that when he came to Corinth preaching the gospel he didn’t rely on clever rhetorical flash to win converts...He preached Christ and Him crucified and let the Spirit bring the argument home to his listeners.
5. But then he clarified...it’s not that we didn’t impart wisdom to those who were mature. It’s just that the wisdom we imparted is fundamentally unlike the wisdom and the rulers of this age. And then Paul begins to divide the world into two realities. There are those who embrace the wisdom of this age taught by the rulers of this age who are all doomed to pass away...and then there is the hidden wisdom of God and those who receive it... which has been decreed before the ages for our glory. And these two realities are in opposition to one another. The way of Christ...and the way of the world.
6. And Paul makes the point that if any of the world’s rulers would have understood anything about the wisdom that comes from God they would not have crucified the Lord of glory...if they would have embraced the wisdom that comes from God that they would not be guilty concerning the body and the blood of the Lord. Now let’s go back to 1 Cor 11. Here is the logic I think. The Lord’s supper proclaims the Lord’s death. If your behavior at the table with your brothers and sisters does not conform to what Jesus’ death entails you are effectively shifting sides. You are reacting the wisdom decreed before the ages began for our glory. You are leaving Jesus and His example and aligning yourself with the rulers of this present age who crucified the Lord.
7. To say this more simply...I think what Paul is saying here is to fail to think and respond seriously to what this supper means...to continue using the supper to indulge your own selfishness...is to say to God I want to be treated like I am on the other team. You can abuse the supper by eating and drinking in an unworthy way.

2. Additionally, verse 29 You can eat and drink without discerning the body. And you can see how the structure of Paul's claim is similar to verse 27. Eating and drinking with discerning the body is eating and drinking judgment on yourself. To do this is to invite God's discipline into your life.
 1. Now the big question here is...what does it mean to discern the body? The oldest view is that Paul is saying the church has failed to recognize the presence of Christ in the sacrament. But the problem with that...is that Paul's primary concern in this passage is that the corinthians are despising and humiliating the poor at the supper, not that they are failing to acknowledge the way in which Jesus is present in the meal. That is self evident through the whole passage.
 2. The second view is that what Paul means by discerning the body is that they are failing to recognize that that Christ's body is the church. Everyone, rich and poor. While that makes better sense in the context, it is hard to square that with the basic sense of the greek word for discern. The word means to weigh and judge rightly. The issue isn't that the Corinthians don't understand that the poor are Christian's also...it's that they haven't let the gospel inform how they treat them at the Lord's table.
 3. The third view which I think makes the most sense is that the word "body" is shorthand for both the body and the blood. After all that is what we have been talking about in the passage...and the closest reference to the church as Christ's body is all the way back in chapter 10. What Paul is saying then is that these elements represent the crucifixion of your Lord...and His death for you is calling you into death for others. If you fail to discern that these symbols teach you to sacrificially love those around you, you eat and drink judgment on yourself.
 4. Discerning the body is recognizing the uniqueness of how these elements represent Christ's sacrificial death...and how that sacrificial death for you calls you into a life of sacrifice for others.
 5. So how can the supper be abused? You can receive with an attitude that does not correspond to what the supper means. You can receive in an unworthy way, that is with a heart of selfishness and not selflessness. Similarly, you can fail to discern what this meal requires of you. This meal teaches me that my Lord gave up himself for me and in my eating and drinking I need to give up myself for others. If I am humiliating others in how I eat and drink than I am doing it wrong. IF I am creating distance between myself and others in the church with how we eat and drink I am doing it wrong.
 1. And this meal tells me it's wrong. And it calls me to a tangible response.
3. And I want to close this point by point out....for the people who continue doing these things...the consequences can be extremely severe.
 1. Verse 30 says That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly we would not be judged."
 2. Paul says in verse 29 that people who mishandle the Eucharist eat and drink judgement on themselves and then he says THAT IS WHY...are you wondering why some of you have gotten sick and died recently? It's because you are mistreating the Eucharist by mistreating each other. By failing to consider others. This says God may inflict physical bodily harm upon...even put you to death for abusing the sacrament. Does God do that in

the new covenant? Ask Ananias and Sapphira. If you don't know who they are, their story is in Acts...and they are a couple who lied to the church about how generous they had been and the Holy Spirit struck them dead. Yes God still does this. And that fact isn't meant to make you afraid of God...it's meant to make you afraid of sin. The fear of the Lord...pulls us away from sin...into the love of God.

3. Because God is holy...because his love is holy and his wrath is holy...we should desire holiness. So God can physically judge Christians in this life for their sin. But what kind of judgement is this? What is this talking about verse 32?
4. This kind of judgement is discipline to teach and to save, not to punish and destroy. Paul says But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may NOT BE condemned along with the world. The word disciplined means to provide instruction for responsible living. God's goal isn't harm...God's goal is healing in His discipline. And whether it heals or harms is up to how we respond. Will receive it as His correction, repent and resolve to strive for holiness...or will we stubbornly let our sin destroy us? The wise thing to do is to repent and turn.
4. Paul then closes this section by explaining that the way forward is to make immediate practical changes to how you practice the Lord's supper. Verse 33 So then my brothers, when you come together to eat...and I believe the better translation is share with one another. You probably have a footnote in your bible listing that as the alternative translation. When you come together and you notice that some of your brothers and sisters don't have enough to eat and you have more than enough for yourself...share your food with them.
5. Verse 34 if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home so that when you come together it is not for judgment. About the other things I will give directions when I come.
 1. Verse 34 is saying...if your complaint is...I can't share because otherwise I'll go hungry. Then the answer is eat some food at home so that you can have some to share when you come together. Think about how you can practically put others first, because if you don't it will lead to judgement. That is...to more discipline.
6. The call is, if you have enough to share, and there are those in your midst who don't have enough, you need to be willing to lay down your appetite, lay down your preferences, to lay down your personal convenience, to lay down your own self so that others might be blessed and you might escape judgment. When you look at what the Lord's supper is meant to proclaim you need to discern the body and blood and eat and drink in a worthy way that honors the one who died for us. That recognizes He is Lord and He is our example. Anything less than this is an abuse.
7. We know historically that the early church moved away from participating in communion as part of a feast very early, and some think that verse 34 is the beginning of moving away from that practice. Justin Martyr writing sometime between 155-157 AD described a typical church service and the way they took communion is the way we do today.
8. But in any case...the way we can abuse the supper is by failing to appreciate what it means...that is eating and drinking in an unworthy way...we can fail to appreciate what it requires...that is we can fail to discern what the body broken implies for how we must treat each other, and by implication how we practice the Lord's supper on a weekly basis. And finally we can fail to appreciate how serious it is to misuse the sacrament...as God can judge

us for the purpose of discipline perhaps even leading to death. Verse 34 teaches us that we need to go to be willing to inconvenience ourselves, and lay down our own preferences and rights for the sake of blessings others as we have been blessed by Christ.

9. Example...when we used to break up into family units...
10. So we looked first at what the supper is actually for in verse 26. Next we looked at how the supper can be abused in most of the remaining text. Let's now circle back and ask how should we partake of the Lord's upper in a way that is consistent with the truth of the gospel?

Partaking in a worthy way (28-29)

1. Study what is happening: **In a worthy manner** - the is the Lord's cup. This is the Lord's table. And this represents the body and blood of the Lord...it doesn't say Jesus' table and Jesus' cup though it could...it says the Lord..the King...the ruler of this church...Sovereign to whom I owe all my life and all my allegiance.
 1. This is not about satisfying your parents...or impressing your girlfriend...or being like the other kids.
2. Study yourself: **Examine yourself** - We skipped over verse 28 but now we need to talk about it. Paul says let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. Once I've considered the nature of the meal and what it proclaims...what should happen when I turn and examine my own heart?
 1. Do I recognize how wicked my sin is...my sin cost the death of the Son of God. Do I recognize how badly I need grace just like everyone else in this room? Do I recognize my great need of Him for not only faith but also repentance? Where I see weakness do I recognize that I need Him to strengthen me? Where I see anxiety do I recognize that I am dependent upon Him to give me peace. And that true peace will never be found in the flesh and blood world but in the rest that Christ gives to His weary and heavy laden children? Do I see a hunger and a thirst for righteousness, do I see a yearning to see this broken world made new...do I see a disappointment in who I am because I want to be more like Him? Is that what you see when you examine yourself? Then you are ready to eat in a worthy manner.
 2. Or do I see a heart that is hard, cold and disinterested in the things of grace. Do I see no need for grace in myself...do I see no need for Him...do I feel no desire to draw near to the God of heaven...if that is you...you should not take this meal...that is to eat and drink without recognizing what this is saying about you.
3. Study the table: **Rightly discerning the body and blood** - Do I believe what this is telling me...that despite my unworthiness...that despite the monstrous offenses of my life...despite the great worthiness and holiness of Christ...He has laid down Himself in my place...to pay for my sins. To set me free from sins power...and to reconcile me to God? He wants me week after week to pick up this bread and taste of this wine and to think to myself...as surely as I can feel this bread...as sure as I can taste this wine...that is how sure i can be that He has died for me as I receive Him by faith.

Preparing your heart to pursue grace at the Lord's Supper

1. I say the grace of communion because it's something that Has been given to us as an overflow of the gospel, it was given to us by God, to bless us, that we might walk faithfully with Him from now until the Lord returns or we die whichever comes 1st. So as you are preparing to come...consider these 4 questions:
2. Do I believe Jesus has done what this table says He's done?
3. Do I believe this table means what Jesus says it means?
4. Do I recognize that to receive the Supper is proclaim that I am saved by the death of a crucified King and my life, both body and soul is not my own but His...who is coming again?
5. Do I see a willingness to keep striving to love God's people, even though it's hard and even though I am weak. To struggle with this is different than being unwilling. To struggle is to confess that loving is really hard but you are willing to keep trying. Unwillingness says I'm done with them. Unwillingness, in the case of the Corinthians brought judgement. But willingness reveals the presence of grace. This supper can bless you with fellowship, remembrance and proclamation...or if handled wrongly, it can bring judgement through discipline. That is what God has said...as we close I want to impress on you forever...

MAIN POINT: The Lord's Supper can bring grace or judgement, so prepare and pursue grace

COMMUNION:

[1] Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? [2] For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. [3] He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

[4] Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. [5] But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. [6] All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

[7] He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. [8] By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people? [9] And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth.

[10] Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. [11] Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. [12] Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors.