

Jason Upchurch - 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 - The Lord's Table Manners - Part 2

We are continuing this morning through this section on the Lord's Supper. And I think this section is probably the most confusing and, frankly, misapplied sections. I think there has probably been more guilt and shame as a result of misunderstanding this section than any other passage in 1 Corinthians.

And most of it comes down to bad interpretation. Here's how this section is usually explained - maybe this has been your experience:

Paul says we need to examine ourselves before we take the Lord's Supper. We hear that and so we do sort of a self evaluation of our lives. We go through this internal diagnostic to see if we have have sinned too much this week.

"Well, I didn't yell, I didn't swear too many times, I did flip that guy off in traffic but let's be honest, he deserved it. I read my Bible twice this week...so I think I'm good enough to take the Lord's Supper."

And what we end up doing is creating a self-righteousness meter to determine how worthy we are before God. We have to get a certain grade or we don't pass. That grade, of course, is always on a curve and somehow we think we make it.

There are some of you that actually struggle with the other side. You do the self diagnostic check and fail. Every week because you didn't reach perfection. And you read this warning that if you eat or drink in an unworthy manner that you'll be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. And you're drinking judgment on yourself. And you look and see that some of the Corinthians were being disciplined with illness and weakness and death because of this. And you don't want to die so you'd rather just pass on the cup this week.

I remember being in high school holding the cup and cracker trying to confess as many sins as I could before I took because I thought that would solve the problem. So I'm trying to think of all the bad stuff I can and confessing it as fast as I can hoping that will give me a pass. That's the examination right? So I'm confessing right and left hoping the pastor gives me just another minute or so because I've got a lot of stuff I need to get through.

And in the end I take it really unsure if I've done what I needed to do.

Can I just tell you something? That is not what any of this is about. That makes the Lord's Supper all about me rather than about Jesus. Listen, if you've sinned this week, if you've struggled with obedience - you need this meal. This meal is a reminder that our salvation is not about us, it's about Jesus.

We will never reach some sort of sinless perfectionism in this life. We should be striving for holiness, striving for godliness, but we won't achieve it until we see Jesus.

And I want to encourage you this morning that none of those scenarios I mentioned a minute ago are what Paul is talking about here.

When we are trying to understand what a passage means there's a phrase we often use: Context is what? King.

What that means is that we read the stuff before and the stuff after our passage to get a better idea of what it says. Context is like concentric circles:

We look at the words in the passage

We look at the sentence

We look at the paragraph

We look at the whole section

We look at the whole book including it's genre

We look at the all the author's writings: Moses, Paul, John, Solomon

We look at the whole Bible

This is how we read any normal document. So too with this section we want to let the context help us understand what's going on.

So here's the little secret: the unworthy manner that makes someone guilty is referring to all the things the Corinthians were doing as a church: the fighting and divisions, the gluttony, the drunkenness, the hating each other, humiliating the poorer folks in the church. That train wreck was the unworthy manner that Paul has in mind.

How do we know that? Well look at **Vs. 33. Read**

He says here's the solution: wait for each other, if you're hungry go eat at home. We don't need to have a love feast. What we need is to be reminded of the body and blood of Jesus. If they simply do this meal in order, that will solve a lot of things.

So there's the punchline up front. What I want to do with the rest of our time is walk through this passage in more detail and then actually ask the questions that's on our mind anyway:

Should I take the Lord's Supper if I'm in sin? Are there times I should hold off on taking? We wrestle with those, so I think it would be helpful for us to work through them.

So we've seen the problems with the Supper in **Vss. 17-22**, we saw the pattern Paul sets up for us in **Vss. 23-26**.

3) This third section is the warning. Read 27-32

So whatever else we can say about this paragraph, the warning is severe. To the church that so pollutes the Lord's Supper, there are severe consequences. And you have to ask: why is this warning so severe?

Because what we are do is physically acting out the gospel message.

Marriage is sacred because it is a living, breathing picture of the love between Christ and the Church.

Baptism is sacred because it is a living breathing picture of the Lord Jesus raising someone from the dead into salvation.

The Lord's Supper is a living, breathing picture of the sacrifice of Jesus for our sins.

This is no small matter. It is the biggest matter in all of the universe for all eternity. From before time began - in eternity past - God had predestined his Son to be sacrificed.

Peter says in **Acts 2** that Jesus was delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. Two chapters later he says that this was the definite plan of God: to predestine his Son to crucifixion.

We often have intense discussions about how we are predestined to salvation. But we don't often stop and talk about what Jesus was predestined to.

You realize that when the Bible talks about predestination between the Father and the Son the issue is usually the suffering death of Jesus on the cross? The holy Son of God suffering that was the plan for all eternity past.

And it is what we will be singing about for all eternity future. We will be singing songs, ten trillion years from now about the literal, physical suffering of Jesus 2,000 years ago. It's eternally significant.

And it's cosmically significant, meaning that it has implications for absolutely every being and all of creation.

Col. 1: 19-20: For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by what? The blood of his cross.

When Jesus comes again there will be a great reckoning.

It's like when you reconcile your checkbook or your Quicken or whatever. You finally tally up all the credits and debits and you make everything square.

When Jesus comes back, the entire universe is squared up - it's all set to right. All those who are evil are given their eternal just punishment; all those who are saints are given their eternal gracious reward and eternity begins.

And that great reckoning is all based on one event and one person: the crucifixion of the Son of God. All humanity separated by the cross - you're either covered by it or not. And even all spiritual beings are separated - they're either for it or they're not.

The monumental eternal significance of the cross simply cannot be overstated. And that monumental eternal significance is on display for us every week as we break the bread and drink the cup. The sacred, eternal, cosmic plan of God in Christ is in view right here in our little corner of the universe in our little slice of time. And it matters to God.

Because if we get this right, we are proclaiming the eternal plan of God. If we get this wrong we are corrupting the eternal plan of God.

This little meal is way beyond whether you read your Bible this week. This meal is way beyond your tally of sins. This meal really isn't about us at all, is it? Or what we did. This has always been all about Jesus and what he did.

So when it is corrupted by drunkenness or arrogance. When, like the Corinthians, it's turned into some kind of unrecognizable frat party - it becomes a source of guilt against the body and blood of Jesus.

What does that mean? It means that rather than being part of the crowd that is covered by the crucifixion of Jesus, they are part of the crowd that's calling for the crucifixion of Jesus. When the observance of this meal is corrupted this much it's as though you're killing him all over again.

That's pretty scary. That's why Paul calls for self-examination in **Vs. 28. Read**

So there *is* self-examination, but not the kind we usually think of. What he's talking about is the manner in which we observe. Are we orderly? Are we sober minded? Are we here just to get drunk or have a snack? Is there a way in which taking the meal shames other people?

It might sound odd, but God really does care that when we are together we do things in an orderly way. Look over at **1 Cor. 14:26-33**. We'll get to this in a little while but another area the church was having problems in was the expression of spiritual gifts: speaking in tongues and prophesy.

This is pretty amazing, Paul's solution to the craziness is "you guys need a better order of service." **Read 26-33**

Whatever craziness was going on, Paul says if you just do things in an orderly way - everyone take their turn, no more than 2 or 3 people speaking in tongues or giving a prophesy, this whole thing will resolve itself.

Not have a big conference. Not kick people out. Not question the legitimacy of tongues. Order of service. God is a order, a God of peace. He likes things orderly and without confusion. Whether that's the song set, the sermon, speaking in tongues or the Lord's Supper. A solid liturgy - order of service - is one of the most spiritual things we can do when we gather together.

You realize that heaven isn't going to be this big free for all, right? It's not like dropping the kids off at the arcade or the theme park and everyone just goes and does their own thing for all eternity?

We're eating dinner together, we're singing the same songs with the same lyrics. We're all bowing down at the same time, eating from the tree of life as it gives fruit in proper season. Heaven is a well-oiled machine with orders of service and synchronized watches because that brings God glory.

Random orders of service do not bring God glory. Spontaneous orders of service do not bring God glory. "Feeling the Spirit move" - whatever that means - does not bring God glory. Order does. Thoughtful, gracious, meaningful structure brings God glory.

It brings him glory here at the Lord's Table. And what this means, then, is we need to be keenly aware of the people around us. And how our actions affect the church. **Read 11:29**

What does it mean that we need to discern the body? Does it mean our body? Does it mean the body of Jesus that is represented in the bread that we eat?

Well, the problem in Corinth is that they're stepping all over each other in the Lord's Supper. They're hating each other and humiliating each other. So it seems best to understand the body here as referring to the body of Christ. That is, the church.

The problem with the Corinthians was that they were so self-focused and self-absorbed that they were abusing each other and didn't even realize it.

Paul says you need to discern the body of Christ. When you take the Lord's Supper you need to take a look around. What's going on with the congregation? Is everyone being served well? Is everyone able to come and partake of the benefits of the Supper?

This goes to a bigger principle of just being aware of what's going on around us when we gather together on Sunday mornings. We can become so accustomed to just going through our own routine that we don't even consider people around us.

I saw this little thing on social media that said 3 rules for Sunday mornings. 1. An alone person is an emergency. 2. Friends can wait. 3. Introduce a new person to someone else.

I like that because the Bible says when the church is gathered together on Sunday mornings it's like a household. And we should treat one another like they have come to our family gathering. In order to do that we need to be aware of the people around us.

How do we treat people when they come into our household? Are we looking out for them, and helping them and inviting them? That's how we should treat people in the church at all times.

Here, Paul says that specifically in reference to the Lord's Supper. We need to discern the body. We need to be aware of what's going on with the other people around us. If we're not doing that we are actually eating and drinking judgement, rather than eating and drinking grace.

And the judgement Paul has in mind here is not abstract. It's concrete judgment. **Read 30**

I don't know about you, but that's scary. Paul says the reason that some people are ill and weak is because of their self-centered conduct at the Lord's Table. He also says that's why some have died.

Wow. There's no dancing around that. God is willing to put down the ultimate form of discipline so that the church is not attacked.

Does God care about what goes on at this table? 100%! God is jealous for his people. He is jealous for what happens when we gather together. And he is jealous especially for what happens at this table that is a reminder of the most cosmically significant event in all eternity: the sacrifice of Jesus.

But here's the deal: We could take this warning and just walk around in fear our whole life. "Well, I can't mess anything up in life because apparently God could just decide to kill me or give me some kind of chronic illness." There are people who walk around in life like that. Almost as if God is some sort of abusive schizophrenic king who could randomly slaughter his own people on a whim.

But that's not who God is.

Romans 8:1: There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

I mean, let's be clear: our lives are not our own, they belong to who? God. So he can really do whatever he wants with us. There are plenty of people who lose their lives because they are faithful to God. So it should come as no surprise that there are occasions where his children are so out of line that he afflicts them with illness or calls us home.

These things are actually for our good. **Turn to Hebrews 12:3-11.** This section is good for all of us to hear.

Read

So if you're a son of God through faith, why does God discipline us? Because he loves us. Hebrews says that our own fathers disciplined us imperfectly and we respect them.

God doesn't make mistakes in discipline. He disciplines us perfectly - for our good. No one likes getting spanked. No one likes having their toys or health taken away. But sometimes that's what is needed to get our attention; to bring us to repentance.

Look at what our attitude should be. **Read 12-14**

You know what he's saying? If God is spanking you stop moping around, dragging your hands stumbling. Get up, dust yourself off, and follow the Lord in holiness. That's the whole point of the discipline.

God will never discipline us to break us, he will only discipline us out of love to restore us to holy living. And actually that's what Paul is getting at back in **1 Cor. 11.** **Look** back there. **Read 11:30-32**

He says: You don't want to get disciplined? You don't want to be judged by God? Then you should do some self-examination. Check yourself before you wreck yourself. It's biblical.

But listen, even if you are judged by God - and by that he means disciplined - he does that so we won't be condemned. God would rather spank us through sickness or weakness or even death, than for us to go to hell with the unbelieving world. His discipline is actually the means by which he keeps us in the faith.

That's pretty amazing - God would rather bring his wayward children home than send us to hell. That's grace.

All this brings us back around to the practical changes the Corinthians need to make. **Read 33-34**

They solve all these things by some pretty simple changes. Wait for each other when they're eating.

This passage is why we usually all wait to take the elements at the same time. Now, to be honest with the passage, the point of waiting is so that we're not allowing anyone to go hungry. That's not so much of a problem with us in our context because we don't combine this with a love feast. But I think taking it all at the same time still gets to the heart of the idea.

I've been in some places where people can come up, get the elements, go back to their seat and spend some time in prayer and take at their own pace. I think that's just fine. But what we want to do for sure is make sure that everyone is able to take part in this act of worship.

Interestingly, it appears that Paul makes a drastic distinction between the love feast and the Lord's Supper.

Read 34

Remember that the Corinthians did the Lord's Supper and a love feast together. The love feast was like a potluck.

You ever show up to potluck and you're like "This is all the food we have? Where'd it all go?" That's happened a few times. Can I tell you something? Potluck - like the love feast - is not primarily about the food. It's about worshipping Jesus through fellowshiping with each other. It's about spending time with each other.

That's the bigger issue. The point isn't to have some sort of gourmet meal. The food is to stave off hunger long enough to spend some time with the people of God. To encourage each other, to pray for each other, to bear one another's burdens.

If you're just really starving and want a meal, that's fine but go eat at home. The point of food at a church gathering is to prolong fellowship a little bit to encourage the saints. When we make the meal the main thing it becomes a source of judgment.

I think the last line is actually pretty funny: about the other things I will give you directions when I come. This wasn't the only problem at the Lord's Supper. Which kind of makes you wonder: what else was going on? We don't know and guessing isn't going to help us but just know they were working things out like every church has to work things out.

Let me address a few practical things about the Lord's Supper that I hope you'll find helpful.

1. Is there ever a time to not take the Lord's Supper?

Well, according to Paul if the Lord's Supper is a drunken free-for-all it's better not to take it. But really, the solution isn't to stop doing the Supper, it's for the church to repent.

But what about us personally? I would say there are only a couple occasions. First, if you're not a believer don't take the Supper. This Supper is really for those who are part of the family of God through faith in Jesus. And part of what the family of God is doing as we take is we are proclaiming we believe the gospel and follow the Lord Jesus. If that's not you, or you're not sure, then I'd refrain.

Some people seem to think that if an unbeliever takes the Lord Supper somehow their judgement is greater. I guess that could be the case, but more the issue is that it's improper.

Another reason to not take the Lord's Supper is if you haven't been baptized. Why? Because baptism is really the first act of obedience to the Lord. If you believe in the Lord Jesus, the first sacrament you should take part in is baptism.

That's what God calls you to do first and foremost. If you haven't been baptized and profess faith in Jesus, you need to. I'd be happy to talk to you about baptism.

The only other time is if you're harboring unrepentant sin in your life. I'm not talking about you messed up again this week a couple times. I'm talking about there's sin in your life your messing around with that you have no plan or desire to change. Why not take? Because it's hypocrisy. You say you believe Jesus died for your sins, but you're still actively living in your sins. That's a recipe for discipline.

What if I've fallen into the same sin this week? You're trying to get rid of sin, you're doing what you can to put it off but it keeps tempting you.

You need this meal. You need this meal as a means of grace to strengthen you for this week. To be reminded that your sins are not counted against you and through the Spirit you can put to death every sin.

Pray

Benediction: Jude 24-25

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.