

**Text:** 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, Part 2

**Title:** The Lord's Table

**Truth:** Communion is a very serious part of Christian worship, and God judges those who do not partake properly.

**Date/Location:** Sunday November 22, 2020 at FBC

## Introduction

Last time we learned the basics of the Lord's Table: what it is, and how it is observed. We read about the problems in Corinth surrounding their practice of the Table, which was not at all praiseworthy. Now Paul is going to tell them the right way to remember the Lord, and also the wrong way. We pick up with the section numbering from last time.

## IV. The Wrong Way to Observe the Lord's Table, 11:27, 29-30,

### 32

In 1 Cor. 11:27, the text says, "Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord unworthily [in an **unworthy manner**] will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." *That* is the wrong way to remember Christ!

A. The word "unworthy" is better translated as "unworthily" since it is an adverb. But we do not use "unworthily" in modern English because it is cumbersome. The best translation is "in an unworthy manner."

B. Notice carefully the structure of the text:

Whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord unworthily...

**Whoever** is the subject.

**eats or drinks** is the verb—of course, dual verbs.

**this bread or this cup of the Lord** functions as the direct object.

**unworthily** is clearly an adverb form in the Greek language, and as such it modifies the *verb*, and not the *noun*.

Therefore, unworthily *does not refer to the* **whoever**. Instead, it refers to the verbs **eat** and **drink**. We therefore conclude that...

- C. Unworthy refers to the manner of eating and drinking, not the type or quality of the person. The word "unworthy" does not deal with our spiritual status as sinners because we are *all* unworthy of any of the benefits of salvation. We are all sinners. None of us comes to the Table as "perfect"—just like we do not come to salvation as pre-reformed and renewed people. That is the whole point of mankind's *need* for salvation. The Table is a reminder of the same. Though unworthy in that sense, God invites us to come anyway on the merit of Christ.
- D. So "unworthy" does not refer to the person. It refers to your manner of eating and drinking. But what does *that* mean? Wrestle through in your mind what the apostle means when he says "whoever eats/drinks...in an unworthy manner will be guilty..." It means *something*. You cannot just ignore it. You cannot just come to celebrate this ordinance of the Lord in any way you please. Furthermore, it is important to figure this out because the judgment mentioned in verse 30 is very severe.

To those subjects now we turn our attention: namely, what exactly is the unworthy manner, and how does the punishment work for that?

- E. The meaning of unworthy. Remember, the meaning must be derived from this text, not from a bunch of other texts, or from your traditional understanding. The text itself gives us plenty of information to know how we can approach the Lord's Table in an unworthy manner:
1. In a divided manner – v. 17-19. The divisions were of a certain sort, having to do with rich and poor, with the rich taking much while the poor were given nothing. Divisions based on social standing were starting to come into the church, where there is no division based on social standing.

If the divisions were "heard of" by Paul who was many miles away, it must have been evident to the entire church who were regularly present at the meetings. There was no excuse on their part. The ringleaders were judged; and the entire church was culpable to make sure that this did not continue to happen.

2. In a selfish manner – v. 20-21. Some believers were taking food ahead of others, not leaving any for others, and some were drunk. Obviously, they were in it for themselves. The remembrance table became a meal, which in turn became a feast, which became a drunken party. This excess led many Christians to have a very simple Table service, with no associated meal. That is unfortunate, but it is better than falling into sin self-centered like the Corinthians.
3. In a despising and shaming manner – v. 22. Some believers were despising God’s church—that is, the believers in the body (in its local representation) and were also dishonoring or disgracing the poor.
4. All of this seems to indicate that the memorial was being treated in an irreverent manner, not in accord with the holiness of God. See Leviticus 10:1-11, where there was unauthorized fire and alcohol consumption. The result was devastating for the participants.
5. In an unexamined manner, the reverse of what v. 28 says. The solution to the above is that each one make sure they are not participating in the kind of divisive, selfish, despising, shaming, and irreverent manner. We examine ourselves to check that we are not walking in those ways with respect to the others in the church.

This *also* is a perfect time to examine our entire walk with the Lord in all departments.

- F. Application. Do we have divisions? Perhaps we have bitterness at others in the assembly because of political issues, or any other kind of issue. Maybe we are despising others in our hearts or practice. Are we selfish, do we shame others? Do we examine ourselves?
- G. The sin was described in detail above. Now, what about the guilt of that sin—how does it offend God? It boils down to the phrases “guilty of the body and blood of the Lord” and “not discerning the Lord’s body.” In the first place, those who are in this faction are guilty of sinning against the Lord Jesus Christ and his very cross-work. In the second place, they are guilty of not evaluating

correctly or thinking correctly about the body = the church. If they did think rightly, they would not be treating it so cavalierly. It is the Lord's church, not their social club!

- H. Once you have sinned, you then have guilt, which is a liability to punishment from God. What is the punishment (judgment) for the unworthy manner? The punishment was physical weakness and sickness, and for some, even death. This shows how serious church matters are.

In what measure and exactly to whom God doled out judgment is not detailed. All Paul says is that "many are weak and sick, and a considerable number of you sleep." The word *many* is repeated in English (from two different words in Greek), and the idea is that this has brought consequences upon a lot of people in the church. We do not know the size of the church, but you can imagine that it would not take more than a handful of deaths for the church to feel that "many" were dying.

May God keep us from this sort of behavior. And may He show us if we are guilty of anything of the sort. There are enough causes in this world of weakness, sickness, and death. We do not need any more!

- I. According to verse 32, God does this judgment not with a view toward mere retribution, but to train and discipline us. It saves those so judged from being condemned with the world. That is a very good thing. See Hebrews 12:5-11 for more on God's disciplinary work.

## **V. The Right Way to Observe the Lord's Table, 11:28, 31**

There are two verses that specify the right way to observe the Lord's Table.

- A. By self-examination and participation, v. 28. One who examines his walk with the Lord, checking for sin, self-deception, mistreatment of others, etc. will not soon be involved in an irreverent, selfish collusion to deprive the poor of proper treatment in the church.
  1. *The* issue, remember, in the church was that people were eating ahead of others, becoming drunk, despising the poor, and the

like. The church was a cliqued-up little society where there was an embarrassing division.

2. Even though this is *the* issue, it is not the only thing that can be in the life of a believer or church that needs to be examined before participating at the Table. It is illustrative of a whole range of issues that the believer should consider. There are other ways to mistreat the body of Christ. There are other sins which can cloud the testimony of Christ in the life of the church or the individual. These things are all subjects of examination. As you walk with Jesus and fill your mind with His Word in the Bible, the Spirit of God will help your conscience to know about these matters and you can handle them accordingly. If any confusion arise sin your mind about his, please consult with another brother or sister for assistance.

B. By judging ourselves, v. 31. The self-examining evaluation is a sort of judgment. It is an evaluation that brings about a guilty or innocent declaration in our own consciences. By so doing, we are avoiding “being judged.” This passive idea is that someone else would then have to judge us. That outside judgment seems to be from the Lord, in which case it should be easy to understand why you do not want to go through that. Yet the Lord could implement His judgment upon you by using another brother or the church body to tell you that you are not fit to participate at the Table. This is one tough ministry, but it is a ministry that helps presently unrepentant sinning believers see afresh their need for God’s guidance.

## **VI. Summary of the Instructions, v. 33-34**

The apostle Paul closes his instruction with three summary statements.

- A. He instructs the church to get rid of its division by taking a practical step: waiting for one another before eating and drinking the table elements.
- B. Second, to satisfy their hunger (which the Lord’s Table does *not* do), the believers must eat at home so they can avoid God’s

judgment that results from mishandling the Table. Such mishandling is an abuse of the church body.

- C. Finally, Paul says when he comes he will deal with any details that need to be addressed. That is ominous, because Paul is not an ordinary man. With apostolic authority, he has set a supernatural judgment upon a couple of folks in his past (for instance, Acts 13:11, possibly 1 Corinthians 4:21, 2 Corinthians 13:10).

## **Conclusion**

There can be no question that the Lord's Table is a very important part of the church's worship. The Bible does not give us many detailed instructions on how to sing or do prayers or offerings in the church. But it tells us in some detail here about the Lord's Table, and how it can be twisted into something very bad. How terrible it is that we humans can take something so beautiful as a memorial to the Lord Jesus Christ and turn it into a matter of divine judgment. Let us not do that in our churches, dearly beloved.

MAP

## **On Holiness...A Quote from Bishop J. C. Ryle (d. 1900)**

I have had a deep conviction for many years that practical holiness and entire self-consecration to God are not sufficiently attended to by modern Christians in this country. Politics, or controversy, or party-spirit, or worldliness, have eaten out the heart of lively piety in too many of us. The subject of personal godliness has fallen sadly into the background. The standard of living has become painfully low in many quarters. The immense importance of "adorning the doctrine of God our Saviour" (Titus ii. 10), and making it lovely and beautiful by our daily habits and tempers, has been far too much overlooked. Worldly people sometimes complain with reason that "religious" persons, so-called, are not so amiable and unselfish and good-natured as others who make no profession of religion. Yet sanctification, in its place and proportion, is quite as important as justification. Sound Protestant and Evangelical doctrine is useless if it is not accompanied by a holy life. It is worse than useless: it does positive harm. It is despised by keen-sighted and shrewd men of the world, as an unreal and hollow thing, and brings religion into contempt. It is my firm impression that we want a thorough revival about Scriptural holiness...

*Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots* (p. 5). Kindle Edition.