

TEXT: I Corinthians 11:17-34

TITLE: Ordinary Means of Grace - Reformation & Renewal XXIII
Necessary Preparation for Communion 5

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AM

I Cor. 10:16, Το ποτηριον της ευλογιας ο ευλογουμεν, ουχι κοινωνια του
the cup of blessing we bless, not communion the
αιματος του Χριστου εστι? Τον αρτον ον κλωμεν, ουχι κοινωνια του
blood of Christ is it The bread which we break, not communion
σωματος του Χριστου εστιν?
the body of Christ is it

I Cor. 10:17, Οτι εις αρτος, εν σωμα οι πολλοι εσμεν· οι γαρ παντες εκ
του ενος αρτου μετεχομων. share, partake

I Cor. 10:21, Ου δυνασθε ποτηριον Κυριου πινειν και ποτηριον
You can not cup of the Lord drink and cup

δαιμονιων· ου δυνασθε τραπεζης Κυριου μετεχειν και τραπεζης
δαιμονιων. You can not table of the Lord partake, communion, fellowship

Mt. 26:26, 'Εσθιοντων δε αυτων, λαβων ο 'Ιησους τον αρτον και
ευχαριστησας, εκλασε και εδιδου τοις μαθηταις και ειπε, "Λαβετε,
φαγετε, τουτο εστι το σωμα μου."

Mt. 26:27,28, Και λαβων το ποτηριον και ευχαριστησας, εδωκεν αυτοις,
λεγων, "Πιετε εξ αυτου παντες, τουτο γαρ εστι το αιμα μου το της
καινης διαθηκης το περι πολλων εκχυνομενον εις αφεσιν αμαρτιων.

Mt. 26:29, Λεγω δε υμιν οτι ου μη πιω απ αρτι εκ τουτου του
γεννηματος της αμπελου εως τη ημερας εκεινης οταν αυτο πινω μεθ'
υμων καινον εν τη βασιλεια του Πατρος μου."

I Cor. 11:23 'Εγω γαρ παρελαβον απο του Κυριου ο και παραδοωκα
υμιν, οτι ο Κυριος 'Ιησους εν τη νυκτι η παρεδιδото ελαβεν αρτον.

24 Και ευχαριστησας εκλασε και ειπε, "Λαβετε, φαγετε· τουτο μου
εστι το σωμα το υπερ υμων κλωμενον· τουτο ποιετε εις την εμην
αναμνησιν." 25 'Ωσαυτως και το ποτηριον μετα το δειπνησαι, λεγων,
"Τουτο το ποτηριον η καινη διαθηκη εστιν εν τω εμω αιματι. Τουτο
ποιετε, οσακις αν πινητε, εις την εμην αναμνησιν." 26 το'Οσακις γαρ
αν ασθητε τον αρτον τουτον, και το ποτηριον τουτο πινητε, το
θανατον του Κυριου καταγγελλετε αχρις ου αν ελθη.

Introduction

Just this last Lord's Day morning we had the privilege of coming to the Lord's Supper. Coming to the Table on the first Sunday of the month is our general practice. And as you notice in the bulletin we will be having our customary Good Friday Worship service at which the Lord's Supper will be served again. So as I was coming to the end of this section on the Lord's Supper as one of the ordinary means of grace, I wanted to deal with the kind of preparations you are to make before coming to the Lord's Supper and then what you are to do coming away from the Lord's Supper. I found that the timing is such having just come from the Table and looking forward to the Table on that Good Friday service that we could do either one! So I have opted for the preparation.

I. What does this have to do with the Christian's everyday life?

Since the Lord calls and builds us as Christians, as disciples, as His Church, by the Word, Sacraments, and Prayer, this means that if I do not understand biblically, broadly, deeply and apply that knowledge to these means in faith, then you will not be growing as a disciple of Christ as you ought. Yes, I know our Lord works by sovereign grace to effectively call men and women from darkness to light and life in His Son. Yes, it is the power of the Spirit who operates in Christ's ordinances to bring Him and His blessings to us; Yet these biblical realities do not erase the other biblical obligation of your responsibility to industriously pay attention to the the cultivation of your own spiritual life. You must give careful attention to these means. This is virtually a universal rule of life is it not? If you pay no attention to your marriage; a bit of hit and miss, haphazard attention to her, to him; then what happens to it? If you pay little attention to the behavior, the values, the attitudes and actions of your children; then what will be the result? If you show up to work, whatever your calling may be, and you sort of expect all the various tasks to just automatically work and produce and come together without much attention to detail or any particular serious commitment on your part; then what will be the result? You can think of other examples. The point is that you have responsibility when it comes to your spiritual life. You must diligently use the means which Christ has given for your spiritual growth and communion with Him, if you are to grow in holiness, be strengthened in putting sin to death and increase in obedience, and enjoy an increased communion with the Lord. So then.....

II. When we read I Cor. 11, we can hardly believe our eyes and ears!

The description of what appears to have been going on in the Corinthian Church at what was supposed to be partaking of the Lord's Supper sounds almost unbelievable! Drunkenness?! Some kind of self-indulgent running to the Table to grab up for yourself in order to satisfy hunger!? This sounds more like conduct at some kind of pagan bacchanalian feast than the ordinance of our Lord testifying to His dying love and the security of communion with God by His blood shed for sinners. If you thought that such behavior sounded inappropriate you would of course be right. That was certainly the pagan culture in which they lived. The Apostle

finds their behavior so far from proper that he says that what they are coming together to do is NOT to eat the Lord's Supper. He instructs them in the truth from our Lord's words of institution, instructs them to examine themselves and not eat in an unworthy manner: "For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body." *An unworthy manner*: The Corinthians treated the Table of the Lord as their own table to be treated in whatever way they felt to be OK. As v. 29, says, they did not *discern* the Lord's body; they did not separate, discriminate the difference between this Table and their own, this bread and common bread, this cup from a ordinary cup. Thus they came in an irreverent, careless way without the intention to commemorate the Lord's death as a sacrifice for our sins and without an intent to comply with the engagements that are entailed with communion with Christ and His sacrificial death. You may be shocked to read that such was the Lord's displeasure at their failure to prepare and pollution of the sign and seal of His covenant that "many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep." *You mean the Lord actually brought such chastening that some died? The Lord struck them because of the unworthy manner in which they came to the Table?* Yes. That is what it says. You remember from Gen. 17, and God's covenant with Abraham and his seed we learned just how serious God takes His covenant and its signs and seals. What was to become of that male child who did not receive the covenant sign? "that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant." Since the Lord's Supper in its very nature is a proclamation of the death of the Lord Jesus Christ then it necessarily follows that it cannot be treated as a common meal. It cannot be observed in an irreverent manner. It must not be looked upon and used in any other way than that which our Lord has appointed it because if these abuses are present then such persons are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. The person who tramples the flag of the US/burns it, insults the US for which it stands. The person who threw the shoe at Pres. Bush some years ago insulted the office and the nation which the President represents. So too, if we treat the symbols of Christ's body and blood irreverently so to we treat Christ in His sacrificial work irreverently. Those who treat the covenant signs and seals irreverently, as common, thereby show disdain for the privileges of the covenant and its blessings purchased at so great a price, indeed they treat as common, communion with the living God. The irreverent use of either element or any part of the entire ordinance involves that person in guilt before the Lord.

A. The purpose of preparation is NOT to keep earnest Christians from ever coming to the Lord's Table.

"But let a man examine himself," says the Apostle, "And so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup." The purpose is that every person would so examine themselves and so work through this responsibility, finding the true and spiritual reality of their hearts, would then see that they are fit to receive this ordinance, *let him eat...let him drink*. The purpose is not to keep everyone away from the Table, but that Christians may come rightly and

receive a blessing. If the Lord would not let His Table be polluted in the Corinthian Church, but like Israel of old, He brought chastisements on them for their neglect, then we too for our own sakes and the sake of our brethren, and yes, even with Church discipline for the good of the individual and the body, must see to it that the Lord's ordinance is used in a right way. Please look in the Bulletin at LC Q 172, *May one who doubteth of his being in Christ, or of his due preparation, come to the Lord's Supper?* Treats very gently, very pastorally the struggling Christian. There you are, fighting with doubts and troubles, and says this does not automatically bar you from the Table, but rather resolve these and come to the Table to be strengthened. But then LC Q 173, *May any who profess the faith, and desire to come to the Lord's Supper, be kept from it?* Again addresses in a pastoral way that those who are ignorant of the Gospel or those involved in sinful scandalous lives can be kept from the Table. The purpose of preparation and self-examination is not to keep earnest Christians from every coming to the Table.

B. The purpose of preparation is NOT that only perfect Christians can come to the Table and receive a blessing.

As if we could say, *I have not sinned this week so I can come. I have done all that I supposed to do, so I can come.* Remember our Lord's words in Lk. 17:10, "...when you have done all those things which you are commanded say, 'We are unprofitable servants. We have done what was our duty to do.'" If you think yourself *worthy* in that way (on the basis of personal performance) you are actually unworthy to come. Such thinking and attitudes betray an ignorance of the Gospel of grace and salvation in Jesus Christ. The charge of examination and coming worthily, is not to build your acceptance before the Lord on the basis of your own good actions and attitudes. Is that not like Simon Magus who thought he could buy God's Spirit with money? Do we think that we can come to receive from the Lord at the Table and Commune with Him based upon the level of our own spiritual life and performance? No person comes to the Lord's Table rightly because they are *worthy* or because we are *good enough*. Now it may be the case that a Church Member says, *I am not coming to the Lord's Table because I am not good enough* -- What *could* be going on is that they are using such reasoning as a cover up for living in sin and they have no intention or desire to take Jesus Christ and the Supper seriously. That is not the weakness I refer to. Such a person as that would be exposing themselves to God's judgment if they partook. Nor is this examination intended to put everyone who comes to the Table in a state of doubt about their being in Christ - as if doubt and misgivings about your own spiritual state was the basis for worthily partaking.

C. The purpose of preparation is for Christians to come as Christ calls and welcomes His guests.

Christ did not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance. Sinners are pardoned and reconciled to God in no other way than by Christ through faith. We come then to the signs and seals of the covenant of grace with a Gospel fitness. Unless we have a Gospel fitness to come to the Table we will eat and drink as the Apostle warns in I Cor. 11:29, "in an unworthy

manner eats and drinks judgment to himself.” What is a Gospel fitness? Gospel fitness is genuine repentance and faith. We examine the reality of our deep sense of our own sinfulness and unworthiness and the supreme value of Christ and His work. So then worthiness and discerning the Lord’s body involves two great areas: (1) Objectively that we are in Christ. The Scriptures are clear that the man or woman who has never experienced the regenerating power of God’s grace and Spirit and so turns from sin and believes in the Lord Jesus Christ for pardon and reconciliation - If this is not the case, then they are yet estranged from God, separated from God, dead in trespasses and sins, and abide not in God’s love, but under His wrath. Are you in Christ? Do you trust in Him? The Church has no power to see in your heart and admits those who have a profession of faith in Jesus Christ. You can set yourself before the bar of God’s Word and read the call to trust in Christ and turn from sin and ask yourself with all judgment day honesty: *Have I indeed closed with Christ? Cast myself upon Him alone, His finished work upon the cross? His sacrifice? For righteousness, pardon, and life.* (2) Subjectively that we are new creatures in Christ. It is one thing to know the Gospel, but another to know the power of Christ in the Gospel in my life. As Mt. 3:8, “bear fruits worthy of repentance.” Since the Lord’s death is to set the sinner free not only from the consequences of sin having bore those for me upon the cross -- certainly there is a tremendous sense of gratitude and thanksgiving which must necessarily well up within us for this; But also Christ frees us by His death from the power of sin and so purchases us that we are His own and so coming to the Table I renew my covenant commitment to Christ. But now is there a genuine commitment to live for Christ? in obedience to Christ? As Christ’s own? a determination to change my sinful life? This speaks of the active liveliness of faith and repentance and gratitude in the Christian life. Is there this living activity of grace in the life that gives credibility to my outward profession?