

The Lord's Supper and Those Who Partake of It

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[0:00] Well now we're going to turn to the New Testament and to 1 Corinthians and chapter 11. 1 Corinthians from verse 23.

I want us to think, seen as how we're anticipating our communion season, beginning later this week, to read from verse 23.

1 Corinthians 11. For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which he was betrayed took bread.

And when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, Take, eat. This is my body which is broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

In the same manner he also took the cup after supper, saying, This cup is a new covenant in my blood. This do as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.

[1:06] For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till he comes. Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

Our text is found in verse 27. Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

I want us to think then quite simply about the Lord's supper and those who partake of it. And I want us just to begin by reminding ourselves that the Lord Jesus Christ gave this spiritual feast to his church for its good.

And it seems to me we should therefore attach great value to it, because the Lord has given this feast to us. And I think if we do that we will ensure that we carefully consider the importance of using it, and not neglecting it, and of using it properly.

[2:49] And that we will, as you can see from the context, avoid abusing it. It is, as we have said, a special meal.

And although the bread and the wine are not themselves costly, nevertheless, because we use them in this spiritual feast, they have a significance attaching to them.

The Lord has provided this spiritual feast. And he has given us these simple and yet powerful emblems and seals of covenant love and grace.

And the section that is before us that we are going to look at briefly shows us that there were those in the church in Corinth who were partaking of the Lord's Supper in a wholly improper and unworthy manner.

And it seems to me that it is a helpful verse as we look forward to the Lord's Supper and to anticipating sitting down around his table to show ourselves afresh what this is really about.

[4:05] The study is not going to be exhaustive, but it is going to look at the Lord's Supper itself and those who partake unworthily and those who partake in a worthy manner.

Let's then look first of all at the Supper itself. And we've hinted already that it has a certain value attaching to it.

And it has a certain value attaching to it because it is first and foremostly the Lord's Supper. You remember back at verse 23, Paul tells us, I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you.

He tells us a little further on that Jesus identifies it with his death. And he identifies the whole Supper as the Lord's Supper.

It's something he received and something he delivered to the church. It's not something that he cooked up in his own mind.

[5:19] It's not something that he consulted the other apostles about and they decided, yeah, let's go for this. This will make people think. No, no.

The apostles were given this and they received it. They were given it by the Lord and they received it from the Lord. So its value, its inestimable value attaches to this fact that it is the Lord's.

And Paul emphasizes here, in a context where the Lord's Supper was being misused, I received from the Lord what I delivered to you.

And he received it from the Holy Lord Jesus Christ, as a Supper that is set apart and distinct and to be used in a sacred way.

The great servant of the Lord, the head of the church, the eternal Son of God, become man, instituted this Supper.

[6:24] And as we've said, its value attaches to this fact. He appointed it, yes, he ordained it. That's why it's not wrong to call it Holy Communion.

It is by reason of this fact that it is a Supper the Lord has instituted, he has appointed for our good.

But the second thing I want to look at within this heading, the Supper itself, is the very nature of it. Gives it value beyond reckoning. The Supper, says Paul here, is the proclamation of a unique death.

The death of God's Son. The death of the Lamb of God. And it is, in that sense, something extremely valuable to us.

We proclaim his death, as well as remember it. But it's a celebration too, because it's a celebration of a death that doesn't end at death.

[7:37] Some traditions in the Christian church call the Lord's Supper the Eucharist. And that comes from the word that talks about thanksgiving.

It's a celebration. And the remembrance and the proclamation through word and sacrament in the Lord's Supper is not only simply remembrance and proclamation.

It is thanksgiving. It is celebration. You can never or ought never to separate the death of Jesus from his resurrection. They are like two inseparable links.

When we celebrate his death, we keep it connected with his resurrection. It was the living one who became dead and who says himself, I am alive forevermore.

I became dead and I'm alive forevermore. So the very nature of the Supper gives it value. We remember his death.

[8:45] We proclaim his death. We celebrate his death. Because as surely as it is the death of the sin bearer in the room instead of sinners who receive it, it is also connected with his resurrection.

It is an accomplished atonement for us. It is redemption accomplished in the death of Jesus. That's why the Saviour said he gave his life.

He had come to give his life a ransom for many. For all who by faith, by simple trust, would take that death to themselves.

They would appropriate it. And you can't get beyond that. We simply receive it in our hearts. When the posty comes and we get the mail in through the letterbox, we take that up and we make it our own.

Our name's on it anyway. But we make it our own by opening it. And we do that in our hearts with the message, with the news that Jesus died in the room instead in the place of guilty sinners.

[9:57] And for those who take him to themselves by faith, make his benefits theirs. They are to listen to him saying, do this in remembrance of me.

Remember my death. Proclaim my death. Yes, and celebrate my death too. And we can only do that properly, if you think about it, when we have identified ourselves personally with his death.

That's the second thing we may say about the death, the supper itself rather. The very nature of it gives it its value.

It is the remembrance of his unique death. The proclamation of his unique death. The celebration of his unique death by those who simply receive it as on their account.

But it has value too on account of the elements. We said at the beginning they are simple elements. Ordinary things, bread and wine. And yet in the supper they are used as signs and seals of Christ's body and blood.

[11:22] They never become his body and blood, as some suggest. His body and blood are not in the bread and the wine.

But they are visible representations to us, symbols and therefore seals of his body and blood.

In other words, of his atoning death. And I've said this before, I'm sure. To me it's a wonderful tool in evangelism. To speak to people about the Lord's supper.

What's it about? Where's its roots? What is this strange meal? It takes us away back to Passover, as you know.

We could even argue it takes you back to Abraham on Mount Moriah. The Lord himself will provide a lamb. But it certainly takes you back to Passover. And Jesus' death is the fulfilment of Passover.

[12:27] He is our Passover sacrifice for us, if we have him. And these simple elements are given to us by the Lord himself.

To eat and to drink. In remembrance of him. To proclaim him. To celebrate that death. Take eat.

This is my body which is broken for you. This is the new covenant in my blood. All of you drink from it in remembrance of me. And therefore we are to have a high estimation of these simple signs and seals when we take them for that sacred purpose.

We are not to lightly esteem them. But we are to highly esteem them. The popular illustration on lightly esteeming or despising is the...

You see it on the television at certain times. In Iran or in Afghanistan or Iraq or the Middle East. They take the flag of the country. They set it alight and they trample on it.

[13:44] That's what they think about it. It's useless to them. They despise it. And you see in this context. Paul was challenging the Corinthians to think about how close they were coming to despising the Lord's Supper.

They were treating it as a common thing. As part of the meal they were enjoying together. At least with the exception of the poor. The wealthy Christians were indulging themselves and tagging on the Lord's Supper.

At the end of their meal. They weren't discerning. What they were doing. They were lightly esteeming. But you know we can lightly esteem it by omitting to use it.

We can simply keep our distance from it. You have heard it. I have heard it. People make excuses for not using the Lord's Supper as a means of grace.

And sometimes they will use a biblical argument. But my dear friends. That's not the way to do the thing. You've heard it. You've heard it said.

[14:57] Perhaps you've used the very argument. A person can be saved. A person will go to heaven. Never having eaten the bread and drank the wine. The thief on the cross was in heaven.

And he never sat at the Lord's table. Yeah that's true. But the exception doesn't make the rule dear friend. And it's wrong for us to argue like that. There's no comfort in taking the thief on the cross.

The one exception. Nowhere to see the value of it. Of this simple meal. Of these simple elements.

And yet profound in their meaning. We're not to reason our way out of the this do.

But to embrace it humbly. As from the Lord. It's important to learn from the abuses of the Lord's Supper.

[16:00] Not only in Corinth. In this passage. But in modern times too. I've seen it in certain independent churches. This way. Perhaps a hundred people in the congregation.

Most of whom are members. You come to the Lord's Supper. It's a weekly event. You come to the Lord's Supper at the end. More than half go out. More than half go out.

Because it's just a bare remembrance. But it's not a bare remembrance. In Jesus' mind. It never was intended to be a bare remembrance.

It is. As we've said. It is proclamation too. And celebration. And everyone who owns Christ. Ought on their opportunities.

To proclaim his death. As well as remember it. And celebrate it too. And it can easily be lightly esteemed.

[16:58] By its over familiar use. We're to think about this. As the Lord would have us think.

The Supper itself. Secondly. Those who are unworthy partakers of the Lord's Supper. Now we've mentioned. I will be brief on this. We've mentioned that in Corinth.

There were those who fail to understand. The special nature of the Supper. The uniqueness of the Supper. On account of the fact that it was the Lord's.

And given by the Lord. They did not set the value on it they should have. Personally and exegetically. One can argue that.

It is difficult to see that they did this. In ignorance. They did it in presumption. They ignored its value.

[17:56] They were too self-indulgent. Too self-centered. And Paul admonishes them. You see. Look at verse 22. I'll go back to verse 21.

Verse 20 better. Therefore when you come together in one place. It is not. Notice that. Verse 21. It is not to eat the Lord's Supper.

For in eating. Each one takes his own supper ahead of others. And one is hungry. And another is drunk. What? Do you not have houses to eat and drink in?

Or do you despise the church of God. And shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you.

And therefore you see. He pins down their willful neglect. Of taking seriously the Lord's Supper. Of putting the value on it.

[18:55] That is there in it. And of lightly steaming the poor in the church too. They were self-indulgent. And they were self-centered.

And they were lightly steaming the Lord's Supper. In other words. They were not discerning the Lord's body.

They were not taking seriously what these elements were about. And what the Supper of the Lord was about. And what they were doing.

In eating and drinking in this way. Was bringing upon themselves the judgment. The chastening hand of God in providence. You only need to look at verse 30.

For this reason many are weak and sick among you. And many sleep. Why is that? They were not, verse 29. Not discerning.

[19:52] The Lord's body. Not appreciating what they were about. But careless in it. And they were irreverent.

In their approach to the Lord's Supper. But we must bring that home to ourselves. We must think about it.

You see. It is not enough to look at other traditions simply. And to say. Well there are people. People who sit around the Lord's table. Every week. And they partake of the Lord's Supper.

But they have no faith. In the blood of Christ. They don't believe that we are justified. Through faith in the blood. And that may be true.

But that is actually not our business. They have to stand for themselves. Our business. Is to look at ourselves. Have I got simple faith. In the justifying power of the death of Christ.

[20:49] Do I believe I am justified in the court of heaven. Through faith in Christ. In his death. That is the neb of it. It is ourselves. And if we are in the position.

That we have no regard for Jesus in that way. We don't see his death as relevant to ourselves. It is time to seek him. Say to him. Lord I need to see it your way.

Do I. Do I esteem his righteousness. As indispensable for me. In God's presence. I can't appear before God.

But I can. In Jesus. Complete. I have a right standing in him. And you see. When we. When we.

Think otherwise. We are not discerning the Lord's body. Because the Lord's Supper is all about. Seeing Christ as our all. And we are taking these.

[21:49] Simple elements. And we are saying. I believe. I will remember. I will proclaim. I will celebrate. Jesus. My Lord.

My Redeemer. My friend. So we are to think about it. In those ways. And. Make sure. That.

We are not simply looking at others. Who perhaps shouldn't be. Remembering. But about ourselves. As to why we ought to. On account of our view of Christ.

And our love for him. And what he has done for us. Equally. We can lightly esteem.

The Lord's death. When we. Would come to the Lord's Supper. And yet. Harbour. Bitterness. And sin. In our hearts. And that's a.

- [22 : 50] That's something. That we have to take seriously. We ought to be able to say. Hand on heart. Before God. I can go to the Lord's table. Knowing full well.
- That I have. No ill against anyone. I may have difficulty. In liking the way they live. And what they do. But bitterness.
- And resentment. And antagonism. No. I will not regard sin. In my heart. The importance. Of having. A forgiving spirit.
- And a conscience. Void of offence. Is important. To the right partaking. Of the Lord's Supper. It is important.
- To. That we submit ourselves. To the terms. Of the good news. In Jesus. We obey. The gospel. And therefore.
- [23 : 52] We ought to want. With eagerness. Despite our felt. Unworthiness. We will come. On that a bit more. Shortly. We come.
- With eagerness. We are not going. To be guilty. Of. Of not. Appreciating. Of not. Discerning. The Lord's body. We are going.
- To come. As those. Who have sought. Honestly. To be rid of all malice and hypocrisy and evil speaking and such things.
- May we be able to search our ways and try our hearts and turn to the Lord with renewed thankfulness for his mercy in Christ.
- One last thing before we leave it. Those who are worthy partakers of the Lord's Supper. We thought about the Supper itself.
- [24 : 53] The reasons that highlight its inestimable value. We thought about those who are unworthy partakers. They don't really discern what the Lord's Supper is about.
- What the death of Christ is about. What his rising again is about for the sinner. But lastly then those who are worthy partakers of the Lord's Supper.
- The first thing I want to say about this is cast in a negative. It's certainly not those who feel themselves personally worthy.
- My dear friend you'll never get to this stage. What if you do? You're not worthy. If you get to the stage you think you're worthy and therefore I'll come forward.
- Forget it. We don't go because we feel worthy. We don't decide right I'm worthy now.
- [25 : 59] We've ticked all the boxes and I feel worthy now. No it's not like that. Nor is it a case I submit to you. Of feeling personally totally unworthy.
- Now listen carefully to what I'm saying. You see there are those who say. And sometimes ministers in their enthusiasm say it too.
- That if you feel yourself to be totally unworthy. Then you should come to the Lord's table. That makes coming to the Lord's table dependent upon one thing.
- Human personal unworthiness. And that is not a criterion. That is a safe footing. Because if we say that then.
- We are making that the important criterion for coming to the Lord's table. And neither personal worthiness or personal unworthiness.
- [27 : 02] Is a criterion. For coming to the Lord's table. Let me give you a few questions to answer.
- That seem to me to add up to. Why I may dare. To profess the Lord. And why I may dare. To sit at his table.
- I hope this will clarify. Rather than confuse the mind. Seems to me the chief clue. For what I'm about to put forward. The way I'm reasoning here.

Is given by. By. Well Jesus yes. Through Paul. The problem that Paul identifies. About the Corinthian. Mistaken approach.

Was that they were not. Discerning. The Lord's body. They weren't weighing. What they were about. In relation to Jesus.

[28:03] Let me ask this question. Do you accept. With gladness of heart. That there is no other savior. Than the eternal son of God.

Who became man. You believe it in your heart. God. Well that's criterion one. Do you accept.

That without faith. In the death of Jesus. For the sinner. The sinner's substitute. That you would forever be cast away. From God. If you can say yes to that.

That's criterion two. You see you're. Putting your trust. In the. Merits of his death. To this we can add.

Do you accept. That your worthiness. In the court of heaven. In the presence of the father. Is only because.

[29:04] Of the Lord Jesus Christ. And simple faith in him. Your acceptance. In. The presence of almighty God.

Is dependent. Upon the right standing. Given to you. And received by faith. In Christ alone. That's criterion three.

Three. And to this we can add. That it is our whole desire.

And our endeavor. By his grace. To live according to his word. Depending on his spirit. That's criterion four.

And if you stick to these. You're sticking to the Bible's way. To the word of God's way. You see.

[30:04] We're relying in the first place. On the only redeemer. The only savior of sinners. See what I'm getting at you.

Take it his way. Take personal worthiness. Or unworthiness. No. No. They're not criteria to use. The criterion to use is.

The right standing. The worthiness I need. To partake of that supper. Is the worthiness. Of Jesus. And only Jesus.

Given to me. And he or she ought not to be there. At that table. Without that worthiness.

You see. See what I'm saying. It's his. Given to us. We can't see the garment of salvation. Be nice if we could. But we can't. No. But we believe.

[30:59] We take him at his word. That by simply trusting to him. He adorns us. Without right standing. It matters. Our worthiness.

To be there. To be there. To be there. Is all of Christ. And our simple trust in his death.

As a death on our behalf. Gives us an entitlement as well. To be there. And our readiness. To seek by his grace.

To live for him. Yes. I know. Falteringly. But seeking by his grace. To live for him. In worship and service. Is another criterion.

Use it friend. Don't complicate the thing. Don't rely on feelings of worthiness. Your own. Don't rely on feelings of unworthiness.

[32:03] Your own. Rely on him. Who alone is worthy. And if you're saying.

Quietly to me. Aye. But you see. The problem for me is. I see so little improvement. In my life. I see so little faith. So little evidence.

Of grace. Well. There may be more here. Who think like that. Than you know. You actually.

If you were to get a show of hands. You would get a surprise. Most. Of the Lord's people. Feel. The problem. Of the lack of progress.

In the faith. Their lack of faith. After so long a time. Their lack of. Applying. The knowledge. They have. Who more than the minister. But you see.

[33:00] All that. And worthiness. Turns us back. To Jesus. Who alone is worthy. And we simply. Frankly. Tell him it.

As it is. Confessing our sins. Knowing he is faithful. And just. To forgive us. And to cleanse us. And to enable us.

To go on in the way. And. To sit at his table. And remember his death. And proclaim his death. And celebrate his death.

It is a high. And holy privilege. That we should. Use and not abuse. Neither neglect.

But see it. As a benefit. As a true means of grace. With the word. Let us use it.

[33:57] And be the better for it. In him. Amen.