

Saturday Evening - English

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 24 August 2019

Preacher: Rev Alasdair Macaulay

[0 : 00] 1 Corinthians 11 and verse 27.

Whoever therefore eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord.

Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner. Sometimes in life a welcome is accompanied by a warning.

I remember being on holiday in Cyprus quite a few years ago and we took an excursion to Egypt and the tour guide said you're welcome to take a ride on the camels but because they're not licensed if police turn up they'll just take off and if you're on a camel at the time well, tough. So it was inviting but it was off-putting at the same time. Well, let me give you a less exotic example. I remember a few years ago when I lived in Lewis going to view a tractor that I was considering buying and the seller said to me you're welcome to take it for a spin but the brakes don't really work like most tractors I think in Lewis.

[1 : 48] But you get the picture. There was a welcome but it was accompanied by a warning. And sometimes people feel a bit like that about the Lord's Supper.

If you're a Christian you know that you are instructed to come to the Lord's table. But at the same time passages like this one you find frightening and maybe even a little off-putting.

Here that warning that we're talking about is about partaking in an unworthy manner. That scares people. Because let's be honest which one of us is worthy to sit at the Lord's table?

Absolutely none of us are. But you know the truth is that this has nothing to do with whether you are worthy or not.

These verses are not referring to an individual's standing before God. They're not to do with your worthiness or lack of it. They are referring to the manner in which the Lord's Supper was being celebrated in Korah.

[3 : 04] It was being abused. There was a complete lack of reverence surrounding it. In Corinth the observance of the Lord's Supper had become shambolic.

There were some folk who were getting drunk. There were others who were gorging themselves on food. Meanwhile brothers and sisters in Christ were left to starve.

Look at verse 17. Paul says in the following instructions I do not commend you because when you come together it's not for the better but for the worse.

So it's that kind of scandalous abuse of the Lord's Supper that Paul speaks of here when he warns about eating and drinking in an unworthy manner.

He's not at all saying you need to be worthy before you come to the Lord's table. If he said that then he would have excluded himself from coming because Paul was very aware of his own shortcomings as a believer.

[4 : 10] Yes he was serving the Lord but he knew that he was far from worthy. He knew that he was a sinner. He knew that he still had sinful traits and tendencies and temptations. In fact he says himself in 1 Corinthians 15 for I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of God.

So what he's addressing here then is a disgraceful abuse of the Lord's Supper. It was bad. It was bad.

And you might then have expected him to say well just cancel it. Just cancel it until you get this sorted.

But he doesn't say that. So why doesn't he say that? Well he doesn't say that because the Lord's Supper is something that we do in obedience to the instruction that Jesus himself left us.

And therefore it would be disobedient to abandon it. It would be disobedient to abandon it. And that is important for this reason. Because it shows us that just as it is wrong to partake of the Lord's Supper in an irreverent manner like they were doing there.

[5 : 35] It is also wrong to stay away when you ought to be there. Because Jesus commands us do this in remembrance of me.

It is a command. It is not an option. So I want to look at three things tonight from this passage. First of all we will consider the problem. The problem.

What exactly was going wrong in Corinth that caused Paul to speak in such strong terms about it? The problem. And then secondly the presence.

The presence. How is Jesus present in the sacrament? Because we are told in verse 29 that we must discern the body.

So we will consider the presence secondly. And then thirdly the practice. The practice. I wonder tonight if you are apprehensive about the Lord's Supper tomorrow.

[7 : 08] Some people get really nervous when it is communion time. They get frightened. And Jesus never intended that.

Never intended that. Because Jesus instituted this for our benefit. He gave us the Lord's Supper for our good. And he did it.

Let's remember that he did it in the face of his own impending death. Verse 23. The Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed took bread.

He was facing death but he was thinking about you. It was about two years ago there was a story in the news about a surfer who spent 32 hours if I remember correctly.

32 hours in the sea. He was stuck there basically. All that time, all these hours, he tells that he believed he was going to die.

[8 : 17] It's a long time. 32 hours. But you know, our Lord Jesus spent 32 years plus anticipating his death knowing that he was going to die.

That surfer, he tells that on the second night as the sun set that he thought this is it. And here we're looking at an evening situation where the sun is also setting and where Jesus isn't just thinking that his end is near.

But he knows it. He knows it. And yet even in that situation his concern was for you. His concern was for his own people.

And so he made this preparation. He gave us this sacrament for your benefit and for your blessing. And therefore we ought not to be apprehensive as we anticipate the Lord's Supper.

So let's look then first of all at the problem. The problem. Well in Corinth as in other places at that time believers the church would meet for a meal and then after the meal they would celebrate the Lord's Supper.

[9 : 45] But in Corinth there were clearly issues. Issues that led to problems. Problems that were pretty severe. And that appalled the apostle and that caused him to write in very strong terms to this church.

I read it already. Verse 17. I do not commend you when you come together. It's not for the better but for the worse. So what was the problem? Well the problem stemmed from divisions in the church.

Cliques had developed in the church in Corinth. there were folk who hung out together and others just weren't welcome with them.

The divisions were mainly between rich and poor. And so this meal that they had prior to the supper it was always meant to be a sharing meal. The New Testament church was a sharing church.

We see that in the very early years. They had everything in common. They shared. And that was the intention of this meal. And folk were supposed to bring along something and share it with those who had less than themselves.

[10 : 58] But what had happened in Corinth was the rich, well they were having a feast. And the poor were left to go hungry. And so this was, for Christians, this was wrong on so many levels.

There was a failure to care for the needy. There was a lack of unity among God's people. They were drinking to excess. And these were the issues that Paul is addressing when he warns them against eating and drinking in an unworthy manner.

And he tells us, shows us how serious it is in verse 30 by telling us that God disciplined some of these Christians for their behavior. Verse 30, that is why many of you are weak and ill and some

have died.

Some have died. That is pretty serious chastisement. God took their lives.

Why? To prevent them from bringing further shame on his cause. Jesus. Now that doesn't mean that these people were lost.

[12:12] These people were not damned eternally. These people did not go to hell. How do we know that? Well we know that because he goes on in verse 32 to tell us. He says, when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

So this is discipline, not condemnation. but these people, some of these people in Corinth, they met with the most extreme form of discipline.

And God will, if necessary, bring on his own people. He took their life. They were saved people.

They were people who will be in heaven. And yet God deemed it necessary to cut short their lives. sin. Because of their sin.

And you know, that's just a clear warning to us. Don't play with sin. Don't dabble in it. Oh yes, as a Christian you will be forgiven.

[13:22] But you may well pay a very high penalty for disregarding, disrespecting, disobeying, or dishonoring God.

sin. So, when we read then that warning against eating and drinking in an unworthy manner, that's what Paul was talking about.

That is the background. That is the problem. This blatant abuse of a sacrament that Jesus had instituted for the good of his people and for the good of his church.

It had nothing to do, nothing to do with whether an individual was worthy or not. And you know, for centuries people have stayed away from the Lord's table due to a misunderstanding of this verse.

And for centuries Christians have trembled and been fearful coming to the table when that was never what the Lord Jesus intended when he gave us this sacrament for our good.

[14:36] I remember going to see an older man who was 90. It was actually on his 90th birthday. And it became clear to me that he was a believer.

had some hints maybe in the year running up to that, but he'd never spoken about it publicly. So we talked about it and there was a communion coming up and I asked him whether he'd ever thought about professing his faith and he said, oh yes, he said, often.

And I said, for a long time. And he says, oh yes, for a long time. And I said, how long? And he said, well, about 40 years. And I said to him, so what's kept you?

And he said, you hear this answer often, I wasn't good enough. And so then I said, well, so what's changed? And he said, I think I'm getting worse.

I think I'm getting worse. That was a good token that this man understood. He understood he was never going to be worthy. He understood there was no reason in waiting, no point in waiting.

[15:47] Because it's not about whether we're worthy. It's all about what Jesus did for us. So people have stayed away because they felt they weren't worthy.

You know, people have also stayed away because of a mistranslation of verse 29. Where it says that anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. But I'm sure you know that the older version said eateth and drinketh. damnation. Damnation. This is not damnation.

This is judgment. And yes, judgment is serious, yes. But it's not final. It's not final. Even those who abused the supper so terribly in Corinth were not damned eternally.

but yes, they did come under judgment from God. So, this passage then, we're looking at the problem and we're saying it's got nothing to do with what you are like as a person.

[17:01] It's all to do, friends, with whether you trust Christ for your salvation. St. Paul, I quoted Paul earlier when he said, I am the least of all the apostles and do not even desire to be called an apostle because I persecuted the church of Christ.

But he went on to say this, by the grace of God, I am what I am. And that's all a Christian can say.

You're never going to come because you are worthy. You're only going to come because of what the Lord has done for you. If you're trusting Him and you come to the sacrament and you come with faith, not with fear.

You come with trust and not with trembling. So that's the first thing. And the problem was that total disrespect for the sacrament and an abuse of it in Corinth.

The problem. One looks secondly at the presence. The presence. So under the first heading we were looking at eating and drinking in an unworthy manner.

[18 : 18] I want to explore now how we eat and drink in a worthy manner. And verse 29 gives us a clue when it says anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.

Discerning the body. That's easy to say. But what does it mean? To discern the body. The NIV we use in our own congregation and it says recognizing the body.

I prefer this translation because I think we use the word recognize to speak about something you can see. When you meet someone you see them and you recognize them.

I think discern is a word that's more suited to something that you cannot see. You cannot see it. It's not visible.

So how do we discern the Lord's body? Well this is talking really about his presence at the Lord's table. So how is the Lord present when the passage actually makes clear that he's absent?

[19 : 31] It's clear that he's absent because he says that we're going to do this verse 26 until he comes. So therefore he's not there. He's somewhere else.

We know where Jesus is. We know where Jesus physically is. His physical risen body with the nail marks in his hands. He's in heaven. He's physically in heaven.

However he is present spiritually in the sacrament. blood. So the emblems, what we call the emblems, the bread and the wine or the elements, they symbolize his presence.

They're a reminder to us of his presence. What Jesus taught us was that the bread represents his body and the wine represents his blood. But how do we discern him there?

Well it requires faith. So faith is believing in something you cannot see. So we perceive that Jesus is there because Jesus invited us to come to his table.

[20 : 45] And you can't believe that Jesus would invite you to come to his table and then not be there himself. We know that he's there. We believe that he's there.

We trust him. And so our faith leads us to believe that he is there. By faith you discern him. So that rules out anybody who does not have faith in Jesus, they should not be at the table.

Because they cannot discern him. So the bread and the wine, they remind us of what he did for us. but it is by faith that we discern.

Now, you may be shaking your head and going, that didn't really help me. Well, for some, maybe that explanation is actually too simple and for some, that attempted explanation is too complicated. Well, if you thought I could explain it or if I even thought I could explain it, I would have done better than the greatest theological minds in centuries. Because even the great reformers, John Calvin, Martin Luther, Swingley, they couldn't agree, they couldn't agree on how exactly Jesus is present.

[22 : 05] And they certainly couldn't explain it. But they believed it. They believed it. The Scottish theologian of the same era as the reformers, Robert Bruce, he also attempts to explain how Jesus is present in the sacrament.

And he does that in a book entitled The Mystery of the Lord's Supper. And I think the title gives it away. Because it is mysterious.

And although we cannot adequately explain it, we believe it. We believe it. But here's the thing. You don't actually need to understand it all to know that you are meant to be there.

You don't need to be able to explain all its intricacies to know that you benefit from the Lord's Supper. Think of it this way.

This is not a great illustration. But I love Indian food. Can't beat a good curry. But I can't explain how the chemistry of all these different ingredients, how they all work together to give you this color and this flavor and this consistency and that taste.

[23 : 21] But I know that it satisfies me. Just know that it satisfies me. Maybe then you want to ask about nutritional value. Is it actually good for me?

Well, that's debatable. But if we ask a little about the Lord's Supper, is that good for me? The answer is absolutely yes.

And even if you cannot understand it all or get your head round how Christ is present in the sacrament, if you want to talk nutritional value, it is for your spiritual good.

And that's why Jesus gave it. And that's why you need to be there. You need to be there if you're a Christian. Robert Bruce, the man who wrote the mystery of the Lord's Supper, he was asked once, so what do you get in the sacrament that you don't get in the weekly preaching of the word of God?

And this was his answer. He said you get the same thing better. You get a better hold of Christ. [24 : 38] it's good for us to be there. What if you lack assurance? Maybe the desire of your heart is to follow Jesus, but you're not absolutely certain that you're a Christian.

You still have niggling doubts. Well, to quote Bruce again, he said this, God's word is appointed to work belief, and the sacrament is appointed to confirm this belief.

So the Lord's Supper is a means of strengthening your faith and of assuring you of your salvation. And if you're looking for assurance and you're waiting for assurance tonight, well, maybe that assurance will only be found when you take this step of obedience to Jesus and come to his table. So that was the presence then. Secondly, we discern or we recognize Christ's presence by faith. By faith. And then thirdly, I want to look at the practice.

[25 : 47] We've seen the problem, we've considered the presence. Thirdly, the practice. What actually happens in practice? How does the Lord's Supper benefit us?

What should you be thinking about when you come and you sit at the Lord's table? Well, I want to approach this by suggesting to you, and they're just suggestions, by suggesting to you four directions you should be looking as you come to the Lord's table.

So the first of these is to look within. Look within. Now, granted, this should be done before you come to the Lord's table. We see this in verse 28.

let a person examine himself, and then let him come and eat and drink. So this examination should not cause you to stay away.

But this examination should cause you to deal with anything inappropriate that you find in your life, with any sin that you find that is inappropriate for the Christian.

[26 : 50] in the Passover, and remember Jesus used the Passover to institute the Lord's Supper.

But in the Passover the children of Israel were instructed to get rid of the yeast from their homes, to get rid of the leaven from their homes. And we're told in the New Testament that that leaven was a symbol of sin.

So it was really teaching us to get rid of sin. before you partake. And that's a challenge. That is a challenge.

But here's what comforts me. That in the Passover, when the angel of death was to pass through Egypt, what did God say he was looking for?

Did he say I'm looking to see if there's any signs of leaven left? No. He said when I see the blood, I will pass over you.

[27 : 54] Yes, we must make a determined effort to deal with sin in our lives. But you're not worthy because you're sinless.

You're coming because you're sheltering under the blood of Jesus Christ. So you look within as you prepare to come to the supper.

And at the supper itself, secondly, the second direction is you look back. You look back to Calvary because the bread and the wine are reminding us of what happened there, of the broken body of Jesus and the shed blood of Jesus.

And that's what it was all about. That's what he told us. Do this in remembrance of me. So that should be central to your focus at the supper.

Looking back what Jesus did at Calvary. As well as looking back to the cross, I think we should also be looking back to where he found you and where he took you from.

[28 : 59] We were considering that in the Galactian last night. He found you in a barren desert, Deuteronomy 32, and a howling wilderness.

So we should be remembering what he took us from. And again, that was part of the Passover meal. They were to eat it with bitter herbs, a reminder of the bitterness of Egypt.

So remember what he took you from, but remember what he did for you. So you look within, you deal with sin, you look back to the cross and where he took you from.

The third look is to look forward. Look forward. Because in celebrating the Lord's Supper, he tells us in verse 26, that we do this, we proclaim the Lord's death till he comes.

Till he comes. He's coming back. He's coming back. Don't forget that. Think about that as well as you sit at the table. It is a remembrance, but it is also an anticipation.

[30 : 08] anticipation. And then the fourth look, the fourth selection that you should look, and these are just suggestions, is that you look around. You look around. This is an important aspect of the Lord's Supper that we maybe tend to overlook or we tend to forget.

It is a communion. And it is a communion with Jesus himself, but it is also a communion with his people. It is a fellowship meal.

We are there with the family of God. We are sharing it with our brothers and sisters in Christ. You know, Paul here, he lays emphasis on discerning the body.

But Paul, throughout his writings, often emphasizes the fact that the church is the body of Christ. Christ, he's our spiritual head, we are his spiritual body. And so, while it's clear, if you read this all again when you go home, while it's clear that in the words of institution, from verse 23, etc., where Jesus was talking about the body, that he clearly is talking about his own body there that was given for you.

[31 : 26] But then from verse 26 onwards, when Paul goes on to add his own commentary, I wonder if it's possible that in his references to the body, he is also thinking about the church.

He's not just talking about the physical body of Jesus, but he's talking about the spiritual body of Jesus, that is, the church.

And if you look at verse 29, for anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, you're probably more used to reading that as anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body of the Lord.

Most of our versions put of the Lord in there. But it's not there in the original Greek in which the New Testament was written.

It's probably implied. It probably is the physical body of the Lord it's speaking about, because that's what the preceding verses are.

[32 : 40] But I think it's likely that Paul also has in mind to remember as believers that we are a body, that we are the body of Jesus.

Because remember, that's this whole context. That was the starting point here, that believers weren't fellowshiping together as they ought. That some were going hungry and some were gorging themselves and some were getting drunk and they weren't looking out for one another. And he's saying that ought not to be so. again, if we're to learn from the Passover, that was a family meal.

A family meal. And so too is the Lord's Supper. We're the family of God. So that then was the practice.

The practice. How do we benefit? How can we benefit more from the Lord's Supper? Well, there's these directions that you can be looking.

[33 : 50] And sometimes it is the first one, the look within and the resultant repentance that will strengthen your faith. Other times it's the look back to the cross that will melt your heart or to our remembrance of where he took you from.

Sometimes maybe the look forward to Christ's return will encourage you and keep you going in the midst of hardship and trials in your life.

Or maybe it will be the look around and the blessing of belonging to the family of God that will be a means of grace to your own soul tomorrow.

God's love. The all important thing is that you have faith in Jesus Christ. Because without that you have nothing.

You have nothing. And so tonight if you trust him, even if your faith is shaky, and even if you lack assurance, Jesus says, you come.

[35 : 05] You come. And you know, if he bids us to come, why should you be fearful? Why should you be anxious? Do this, he says, in remembrance of me.

Amen. May he bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. Amen. Lord, we thank you for your care for us. We thank you for this institution of the Lord's Supper, this sacrament that you have left us for our benefit.

And lest we forget, we are forgetful creatures. And so often, Lord, we fail to appreciate your love for us, for all that you've done for us.

We pray, Lord, that over this weekend of communion, we would be reminded of that great love. We would be stirred up in our hearts to have a greater love for you in return.

So bless us. As we fellowship with one another, may you be in our midst. And may you glorify your own name. We ask these things in Jesus' name.

[36 : 20] Amen. we'll conclude our service singing in Psalm 116. Psalm 116 from Sing Psalms.

It's on page 154. Page 154. Psalm 116.

We're going to sing from verse 12 down to the end of the Psalm 12 to 19. And after we've sung and after the benediction, I've been asked to go to the main door.

Psalm 116 at verse 12. How can I thank the Lord for all he's done? With gratitude, salvation's cup I'll raise. I'll call upon his name and will fulfill my vows to him before his people's face.

Psalm 116. We're going to sing from verse 12 to the end of the Psalm. To God's praise. How can I thank the Lord all he's done?

[37 : 30] With gratitude, salvation's cup I'll raise. I'll call upon his name and will fulfill my vows to him before his people's face.

The Lord holds dear the death of all his sins. heal me, O Lord, I am your servant true.

I am your servant and your handmaid son, and from my chains I have been freed by you.

thank offering sacrifice to you and call upon the name of God the Lord.

When all his people in assembly meet, with joy I will fulfill my solemn word.

[39 : 17] Before his people I will keep my vows within the courts of our God's holy place, within the city of Jerusalem, and to the Lord alone be all the praise.

now may the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all.

Amen.