Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Celebration of the Lord's Supper Part 2
Scripture: 1 Corinthians 11:23-34
Code: 1847

This morning we are in preparation for our time around the Lord's table, going to look at the eleventh chapter of 1 Corinthians where we have been already pursuing the truth that God has there with great benefit. And we usually, as I said earlier, share in the Lord's table on a Wednesday, but due to the fact that this is the study for this morning, we couldn't hesitate to share as well in this hour and with great anticipation and joy at that.

We began our study last Lord's day of verses 17 through 34. This most significant passage that all of us who have been in the church for any length of time are somewhat familiar with, due to the fact that it discusses the communion table, is brought to our attention in the light of its context this morning. I think all of us have at least looked at 23 to 26 time and again in the past but maybe never seen it in its context, in the situation as it existed in Corinth and as it exists today in drawing some very practical insights out of what is around it, not only some positive direction from those verses themselves.

And so we come to part 2 in our study of the celebration of the Lord's supper. Last time we covered verses 17 to 22, this morning we want to look at the remainder through verse 34. But in a preliminary sense, I want to draw your attention to the sixth chapter of John, if I could, for just an initial look at a very important passage which will help us in our understanding of the Lord's supper as Paul discusses it in the eleventh chapter of 1 Corinthians.

John 6:51, in this sixth chapter--among other things--the primary interest is on the Lord Jesus Christ presenting Himself to the Jewish people as the bread of life. And having spent some time discussing that with them, He kind of draws it all to a conclusion beginning in verse 51 in these words, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven, if any man eat of this bread he shall live forever, and the bread that I will give is my flesh which I will give for the life of the world."

Now here Jesus says that He is bread and that He is living bread and that He came down from heaven--statement regarding His deity--and if any man eats this bread, he receives eternal life. And then He refers to the bread as His flesh. All of this comes together to mean that God became flesh incarnate in a human body, entered into the world and when men appropriate--that's what eating means--when they appropriate Christ, they receive eternal life. He's speaking in physical terminology but He has a spiritual message. Receive Me, appropriate Me, take Me in to satisfy your soul as a man takes bread to satisfy his stomach.

"The Jews," verse 52, "therefore argued among themselves, or strove among themselves saying, How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" Here they are interpreting it physically. "And Jesus said to them, Truly, truly I say to you, except you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you." Two things, unless you can accept the incarnation and accept the blood atoning death, you will never have eternal life. Eternal life is a matter of believing that God came in human flesh and that He died a substitutionary atoning sacrificial death for sin. Eating the flesh means acknowledging and appropriating that Christ is God in human flesh. Drinking the blood is accepting and acknowledging and believing and appropriating His sacrificial death.

In verse 54, "He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day, for My flesh is food indeed, My blood is drink indeed. He that eats My flesh and drinks My blood dwells in Me and I in him." Now here from a very physical metaphor or figure of speech, bread, Jesus draws out the appropriation of Himself. He's saying to those Jews, unless you can accept the fact that I am God in human flesh and accept the fact of My death, you will never know eternal life. Eating His flesh and drinking His blood then is not literal, it is figurative for appropriating all that He was and is and has done on the cross.

Now listen, when you were saved you did that. In a spiritual sense, you said I believe Jesus is God, entered into the world in human flesh, I believe Jesus shed His blood as a sacrifice for sin atoning for the sins of the world. And you appropriated it. When you share in the communion and you take the bread and you take the cup, you are symbolizing outwardly that spiritual appropriation. As you accepted the deity of Christ and His substitutionary sacrificial death for you spiritually at your salvation, you are declaring that in the bread and the cup. And so, communion then becomes a symbol of our salvation act. It becomes a reconfirmation. It becomes a restatement. If you will, it becomes a rededication to our salvation act of believing and receiving Christ. And so it's a vital thing that we share in.

And as we saw last time, the early church made it a habit of life to share in the Lord's supper as a sign, as I just said, as an outward symbol of that inward reception. Further, as a memorial, as a memorial to the one who lived and died for them. Thirdly, as a communion, as a living vital communing with Him. And we saw that in 1 Corinthians 10:16 to 18 that when we partake of the table of the Lord we literally commune with Him. He is present. He is here. We fellowship with Him.

And further, the Lord's table is a proclamation. We do show forth the Lord's death. And so it is a declaration to the world that we believe Jesus was God in human flesh, who died a substitutionary atoning death for us. And fifthly, the celebration of the communion is eschatological, it is a great hope. Jesus said, "Do this until we do it together again in the Kingdom." And we are doing it in anticipation of His soon return.

So, this is a sacred special serious and I think worshipful experience in the life of a believer. It behooves us to treat it with that sense of dignity and honor as well as celebration that it deserves. That is precisely what the Corinthians did not do. The Corinthians had turned the Lord's supper into a mockery.

As we saw in our last study when we looked at verses 17 to 22, they had perverted the Lord's supper, and that was point one in the outline and we're going to cover points two and three if you want to look at that outline that's inserted in your bulletin. We saw in the perversion of the Lord's supper that they were coming to the Lord's supper drunk, gluttonous, that the rich were stuffing themselves in a gluttonous drunken manner and withholding from the poor so that they had nothing to eat in the love feast which proceeded the Lord's supper in that era. That they came to the Lord's supper hating one another, with factions and divisions and bitternesses and unconfessed sin.

And the result of all of it is in verse 20 Paul says, "When you come together therefore into one place," and here's the literal Greek, "it is impossible that you should eat the Lord's supper." You may be having something you think is the Lord's supper, but that's an impossibility because of your attitude. Some of you are drunk. Some of you are deprived. Some of you are gluttonous. Some of you are hating one another. There is bitterness, there is faction, there is division. There are class divisions. There are divisions over theological viewpoints. There are divisions over every conceivable opinion within the church. There is no real communion of the believers. There is no real communion with Christ because of all the sinfulness. You have debauched, desecrated the Lord's supper and what you're doing is not the Lord's supper. Whatever you call it, it is not.

Now from that statement about the perversion of the Lord's supper, Paul moves to the second area, the purpose of the Lord's supper beginning in verse 23, the purpose of the Lord's supper beginning in verse 23. Let's look at it.

This is a beautiful presentation of the meaning of the Lord's supper. And if you've been a Christian for any time at all, I know you've involved yourself in the hearing of this passage and perhaps some of you have had it memorized because of its frequency. But what's so beautiful about it is that it's an absolutely...absolutely beautiful portion of Scripture and it's dropped in the middle of a messy situation. It's like a diamond in a dirt clod. It's just...the surrounding situation in Corinth was so vile and so bad and here in the middle of it Paul drops this beautiful jewel of the beauty and the purpose of the Lord's supper, right in the midst of their problem. He says at the beginning of this passage, "This is what you're doing." At the end he says, "This is why you're being chastised." And he's dealing with negatives on both ends, but right in the middle, verses 23 to 26 is the beauty of the meaning of the Lord's supper. Paul was a master at dropping those kind of things in the midst of ugly situations and he does it here.

Let's begin at verse 23. "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you." Stop there for a second. I received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you. What I have to say to you is not human opinion. What I have to say to you is not my own idea. What I have to say to you is not some tradition that's been handed down from man to man. But what I have to say to you I received from the Lord and deliver to you.

In other words, here is a divine reality. Now you say, "Well, wasn't everything that Paul said inspired by God?" Yes, but this is directly taken from the statements of Jesus Christ. In fact, it's practically certain, and I think you find very few conservative scholars who would disagree with this, it is practically certain that 1 Corinthians was written before any of the four gospels. Though the four gospels appear in your New Testament first in their order, they are not in terms of chronological authorship in that order. They were not written till a later period than this. So here is really the first statement of God in print regarding the Lord's table. For a full understanding of all of it, you need to read the account in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, but here is the earliest account of the institution of the Lord's supper and Paul says it was directly from the words of Jesus. He Himself instituted it.

There are two ordinances of the church, communion and baptism, both of them were set in order by the example of Christ and ordained and initiated by Him as well. And this is no different.

So he says this is straight from the Lord, it is His supper, He has instituted it. You notice in verse 20, "The Lord's supper," it is His supper.

Now let's look further at verse 23. "Having received of the Lord," that is by a direct communication of the very words that Jesus spoke that night, he says, "this is what I received, that the Lord Jesus the same night in which He was betrayed took bread. And when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, Take ye and eat, this is My body which is for you, this do in remembrance of Me. After the same manner also, He took the cup, when He had supped saying, This cup is the new testament in My blood, this do as often as you drink it in remembrance of Me, for as often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, you do show the Lord's death till He come."

Now here Paul quotes Jesus. That's why he says this is the Lord's word which I'm delivering unto you. He quotes Jesus the night before He was...the night in which He was betrayed, the night before He died. And I think it's interesting, if you look at verse 23 that he throws that in, that the Lord Jesus, the same night in which He was betrayed took bread. Why does he say that? Well, because he wants to set the history. He wants to put it in its historical context because that has a great deal of meaning.

You say, "But he could have said on the eve of the Passover, or he could have said on Thursday night before the crucifixion. Why does he say in the same night in which he was betrayed?" Because the New Testament does something very interesting periodically. And that is it sets the most glorious,

the most beautiful, the most wonderful against the background of the ugliest so that by contrast the beauty is visible. For example, in John 13 that...what I think to be the most beautiful passage on love in the Bible, next to the story of the cross, Jesus washing the disciples' feet. All the way woven through the passage where He washes the feet of the disciple is the interlude of Judas who is about to go out and betray Him. And you have Satan entering his heart right in the midst of this whole thing. And so the contrast between the hate of Judas and the filth of the devil against the beauty and the love of Jesus makes it all the more wonderful.

At the cross where you have God the Son dying for the sins of the world, all around it is hatred and mockery and rejection. Because that makes it all the more beautiful. And here in the most beautiful ordinance that the Lord has ever given for the celebration of His church, set against it is the terrible hatred, cruelty of a betrayal. But that gives it all the more beauty against that dark background.

Now I want you to notice that this was not just an ordinary night. It was not just the night He was betrayed, it was not just the night before He was crucified, it was the Passover that they were eating that night. Once a year the Jews celebrated the Passover. The Passover was a commemorative feast that reminded them all of what God had done in delivering them from Egypt in the past. They had been in bondage in Egypt for over four hundred years and God had delivered them, you'll remember, by a series of plagues, the last of which was the death of the first born. The only way they could escape the execution of the first born in their houses was to kill a lamb, a spotless lamb incidentally, the firstling of the flock, take the blood, sprinkle it on the doorpost and the top beam. The angel of death would come and pass over the house where the blood was. That's why it's called the Passover.

And God said I want you to have a feast that night. I want you to eat that lamb. I want you to eat bitter herbs. And I want you to eat unleaven bread. And He instituted a feast that has been memorialized from that time till today by orthodox and even some conservative Judaism. So this was a...this was the apex really in the history of Israel, Passover.

You see, Passover for a Jew celebrated the delivering power of God. It was God as Savior, taking them out of Egypt to the promised land. It's equivalent to us to the cross where He takes us out of bondage to sin into the kingdom of His dear Son. It's the same parallel. It's God the delivering saving God. And so this was the night to celebrate it. And incidentally, remember always Jesus was crucified on Passover. You know why? Because He was the ultimate Passover sacrifice. He was the ultimate sacrifice of deliverance.

So, the night before they were eating the meal. And Luke 22:7 indicates to us that it was in fact the Passover meal. You don't need to look it up, but you can look it up yourself at another time. Let me tell you how it went.

The Passover began with a presiding person. It could be the father or it could be a patriarch of the family or whatever, pronounced a blessing called the "Kiddish." And I'm not too good at Jewish pronunciation but that's sort of what it's called. Some of you may be better at that. Kiddish, that was the blessing over the first cup. Now there were four cups that were drunk in the Passover. Number one was the kiddish. That was the blessed cup. And it was always red wine. And that was, of course, symbolic of the blood of the lamb at the pass over in Egypt.

The presiding person would drink the cup and then he would pass it around and everyone else would share. And that was followed by what you would sort of today call hors d'oeuvres, appetizers, bitter herbs dipped in haroseth(?), got to say haroseth, get that right, Hebrew accent. And they took the bitter herbs and they dipped it in the haroseth which is a fruit sauce. And they ate it.

Now after that was done, it was kind of preliminary, just getting the appetite sort of worked up a little bit, wetted, if you will. There then came a lecture on the meaning of the Passover. This is still traditional. The Passover was described. They were to eat a lamb because it was a lamb that God had prescribed to be slain and the blood of which was sprinkled on the door. The lamb was then eaten to symbolize God's passing over Israel in Egypt. They ate bitter herbs because it symbolized the bitterness of their bondage. They ate unleaven bread because Israel was being redeemed out of Egypt and they were going to be going in a big hurry and haste demanded bread that wouldn't spoil because they wouldn't be able to make any more once they got on the road. They needed that kind of unleaven bread that looked like a great big huge saltine cracker and it would last a long time.

So all this is explained in the Passover, after the initial herbs and wine. And then they sang. And what did they sing? They sang the hallel from which we get hallelujah. The hallel is Psalm 113 to 118 and they would begin by singing either 113 or 113 and 114. That was the opening hymns that they would sing after the explanation of the meaning of the Passover.

Now after they had sung a couple of the Psalms, they would then take the second cup, cup number two. After cup number two, the leader would take unleaven bread, that's that great big flat cracker-like thing, the unleaven bread and he would bless God, he would break it and hand it out to everybody and then the meal began. I told you last week that meals always began when the host broke the bread, and then the Passover meal was eaten.

When the Passover meal was done, the host prayed and then took the third cup. Again a cup of wine, prayed and they drank it. After that they sang the rest of the hallel, Psalm 115 to 118. That's why the disciples the night, you'll remember, in which the Lord's supper was instituted it says, "And after they had...what?...sung a hymn they went out." They were singing the remainder of the hallel, that was traditional. And after they had sung all of that, before they dismissed, the fourth cup was taken and this was to celebrate the coming kingdom.

So there they were. If you study the gospels with that in mind, you can pick out just about detail by detail what their doing at each point in the Lord's supper, the Passover. Somewhere along the line at the point of unleaven bread being broken before the meal, Jesus took that bread that symbolized the exodus, broke it and said, "This bread is My...what?...body." After the meal He took that third cup, and we know it was after the meal because it says, "After He had supped," or after He had had supper, it doesn't mean after He had drunk it first, it means after supper. He took that third cup and said, "This cup which to you has represented the blood of a lamb at the Passover is no longer representative of that, this cup is My blood which is shed for you." And by that, Jesus transformed the Passover into the Lord's supper. And He said, "Now when you want to remember, you don't want to remember exodus, you don't want to remember Egypt anymore, you don't want to remember Passover when you think of Savior God, when you think of God as deliverer, you want to remember My death.

The Passover was a great thing that got you out of Egypt and ultimately into Canaan. My death is going to get you out of bondage to Satan and ultimately into heaven. The Passover provided for you only a physical release. My death will provide for you an eternal and spiritual release. And when you want a contact point for God as Savior, for God as deliverer, it isn't going to be the Passover feast, it's going to be the Lord's supper. And so did Jesus take this beautiful Passover feast and the night before He died He turned it over and made it into His own supper. And now when we come together it isn't to celebrate God as the great deliverer because of what He did in Egypt, but it's God the great saving delivering God because of what He did at the cross, you see. Transformation took place.

Now I want you to notice something. The Roman Catholic Church and I think even the consubstantiation view of the Lutheran church and so forth says, "This is My body," verse 24 and verse 25, "This is the New Testament in My blood," and because of a misunderstanding of the meaning of estin(?) the verb to be in the Greek, they have decided that that has to literally be the body and blood of Christ, either in a very physical sense or in a sort of a strange spiritual sense. That's not what He's saying.

The verb to be, estin or whatever form you want, singular or plural, is frequently used to mean represents. This bread is not His body, it represents His body. This cup is not His blood, it represents His blood. When Jesus said in John 10, "I am the door," He meant I as a Savior and shepherd of the sheep represent a door into the sheepfold. He wasn't literally a door. In Matthew 13 when He gave the parable of the wheat and the tares and He said, "The field is the world," He didn't really mean the field is the world. In the parable He meant the field represents the world. And He said the good seed are the children of God and the bad seed, the children of the wicked one. And, of course, the words is and are in those cases simply means represents. It's used in a figurative metaphorical sense.

So, here this represents My body, this bread He said. And this cup represents My blood. It was not His blood. His blood was still in His veins when He said that. It was not His body. His body was still sitting there when He said that. So we're not talking about literal things. Remember, that's exactly what the Jews thought in John 6. How we going to eat His flesh, there's not enough of Him to go around, they thought.

So, he says in verse 23, Paul does, that the Lord Jesus took bread. "And when He had given thanks," and that's eucharisteo in the Greek from which you get the eucharist, "He gave thanks, He broke it," and that's so all could share from a common loaf, "and said, Take eat, this represents My body which is for you." This represents My body.

"What do You mean by that, Lord?" Well, the body to the Jewish mind represented the whole man, the total man, the whole incarnate life of Christ. This bread represents all that I am as God incarnate. The mystery of the incarnation is there from the day He was born till the day He died and even when He rose again. The whole of the incarnation is summed up in the term "body." God in human flesh, remember that I became man and suffered and was rejected and was despised and ultimately died for you. But the whole thing, not just His death, in the bread is not just His death but His whole incarnation. This is My body, represents My body which is for you. The word "broken" just does not appear in the better manuscripts. In fact, if you read carefully John 19 it says that the soldiers came by after Jesus was on the cross and they noticed that He was already dead so they did not break His legs, that the Scripture might be fulfilled which saith "And not a bone of Him shall be...what?...broken." We say the shed blood and the broken body...no, the body was never broken. Not a bone in His body was ever broken.

"This is My body which is for you." The two most beautiful words in that verse are the two words "for you...for you." He's saying, "Look, let this remind you, let this represent the fact that God became a man for you."

Why did God become incarnate? For Himself? No, for you. Why did Jesus come into this world and suffer what He suffered? For you. Why did He suffer the hatred and the jeers and the mocking and the despising and the plotting of all the people who just couldn't tolerate Him? Why did He go through everything? Why did He go to the garden night after night after night and pour out His heart in anguish? Why did He sweat great drops of blood? Why did He die on the cross? For you. That's why, for you. This is My body which is for you...it's for you.

What an unbelievably gracious magnanimous loving merciful God...for you. You say, "But I don't deserve it." You're right, still for you. "But I don't want it." It's still for you. If you don't choose to take it, that's your problem. But it's for you. You see, Jesus said, "Look, it's for you. Will you remember that? Everything I've ever done is for you. All the life of suffering and anguish equips me to be a sympathetic understanding high priest for you so that you can come to Me and you can lean on Me

and you can hear Me say yes, I understand, I've been there. For you. I don't need this, it's for you. My body is given for you."

The whole incarnation, beloved, was for you. The reason He died was for you. He died as a substitute for you. He lived in order that He might be a sympathizer for you. That's right.

So, He says in response to that, "Would you do this in remembrance of Me? I mean, since I have done all of this for you, would you do something for Me?" You say...you'd have to say yes, Lord, what? "Would you just do this in remembrance of Me?"

You know, I wonder sometimes about the simplest bottom line of obedience among Christians. I was talking to some Christians recently and I said, well this one particular individual, I said, "How long has it been since you've had communion, the Lord's table." "Oh, I guess about a year and a half." And I said that's a sin. That is sin. That's disobedience. Look at verse 24, Jesus said, "Do this..." Did you get it? "Do this." Now, either you do it or you don't. And if you do it's obedient, and if you don't it's...what?...it's disobedient. Do it.

You say, "But you don't have it here often enough." Then do it somewhere else. Do it in your home. Do it in your Bible study. Do it in your prayer group. Do it. Do this, He said. That's simple enough. Did He say do it in the church? Did He say do it on Sunday morning? No, He said do it. Do this. Why? In remembrance of Me.

I don't know that we can understand the word "remembrance" rightly because we think of remember as something, you know, oh yes, I remember...boom, it happened in the past. The Hebrews didn't think of remember that way. To a Hebrew to remember, now mark it, meant to call into the fullness of conscious mind the presence of the one you were remembering. It isn't just...Oh yeah, I remember that...yeah, it happened back in, you know, two thousand years ago He died on the cross, I remember...I'm remembering, Lord." No. It's to reach back there to that event and pull it all up into the present so that I'm living in the conscious presence of Jesus Christ. When a Hebrew remembered it meant to him that his total mind and soul and heart was filled with the consciousness of the reality of the one he remembered. Jesus is saying, "Do this and when you do it, would you call Me into your conscious mind? Not just My dying for you, but My living for you...My whole incarnation...would you commune with that in Your mind, your conscious mind?"

You see, you can come and you can drink the cup and eat the bread and if your mind's a million miles away you haven't even remembered the Lord no matter what you did until you've cleared out all of the other things in your mind and called Him into your conscious presence. He says, "Will you take this bread and will you eat it and will you do it calling Me to the consciousness of your mind? All that I've done for you My whole life. After all, it was for you, would you commune with that reality?"

Verse 25, "And after the same manner also," the same way, "He took the cup after supper," that's why we say it's the third cup cause the meal was eaten, the Passover meal. He said, "This cup is the new covenant," diatheke is always translated covenant except maybe one place. In Hebrews 9 it should be translated another way, but with that one exception it's covenant. "This is the new covenant, or the new promise, in My blood, this do, or do this...do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of Me."

Now here He takes the cup and He says, "This represents the new covenant in My blood." The old covenant was ratified by the blood of what? Animals. The new covenant is ratified by the blood of Christ. You know, when you sign a document, you ratify it. The President signs a law and it goes into effect. When somebody sends you a policy of insurance or some legal papers or a bill of sale for a house, or whatever it is, you take a pen and ink and with fluid, with ink you ratify the promise. They promise to give you a product and you promise to give them money, or whatever. They promise in an insurance policy to give you protection and you promise to pay them what that protection costs. There is a covenant ratified by fluid, by ink.

In the Old Testament, God said to Israel, "I will lead you to the promise land...I will pass over your house and not execute your first born if you will sign on the dotted line." And what did they sign with? The blood of a lamb on the doorpost and the lintel. And that was the fluid that ratified the promise. God, You do Your part, we will do our part. And throughout all of the Old Testament, God continued to say you've got to ratify the promise in blood. And they sacrificed animal after animal after animal after animal so that the blood flowed through the land of Israel through all of its history as the people continued to renew the promise over and over and over and over again.

And, in fact, when covenants were made in the east, in the ancient east, they weren't made by signing your name at the bottom. An animal was killed and the blood was sprinkled on both parties. You were both doused in blood as a sign you were going to keep your promise. Covenant ratified by blood.

Jesus says there's a new covenant. God is making a new promise. You know what that promise is? It isn't anymore the old one of law. It isn't anymore the old one of you have to do this sacrifice and this sacrifice and this one, it's a brand new promise, here it is, "I will forgive all your sins for all time," and that was new, they had to make sacrifices continuously, "I will make one sacrifice forever and that will be Christ. And His one sacrifice and His one ratification by blood will end the sacrificial system for good." That's a new promise. God says I'll give you total forgiveness forever, I'll give you eternal life forever by the blood of Christ. And it was as if on the cross Jesus was taking His blood and signing on the dotted line. That's the new covenant, the blood of Christ. Not the blood of a lamb on a doorpost where God says I'll take you out of the land and get you to the promise land, that's temporal and impermanent. But the blood of the new covenant where God says I'll take you into heaven and I'll

forgive your sin forever unconditionally because of Jesus Christ, that's the new covenant.

And so He says the cup represents the new covenant. No longer do you need to go back to the blood of the Passover, come back to the blood of the cross. The Hebrews, of course, repeatedly, repeatedly, repeatedly shed that blood, repeatedly over and over and over and over and constantly were saying I'm sorry, God, I bind myself again to Your promise, I've sinned again, please forgive me again, here's my sacrifice again, I want to obey again, etc., etc. But once do we come in the name of the blood of Jesus Christ and bind ourselves to the promise.

But you know something? Every time after that throughout our lives that we celebrate the Lord's table, we are restating that promise, aren't we? We are taking the cup and we're saying I outwardly renew my pledge, my part of the salvation bargain. You say, "What's my part?" God says I'll save you, I'll give you eternal life. I'll forgive your sins forever if you will do one thing, what is it? Believe. When you take the cup, you're saying I believe, I renew that commitment, I refresh that vow, I restate that pledge. And Jesus said do that, would you?

You say, "How often?" Often, as often as you drink it. "Well, how often should I drink it?" Verse 26, "As often as you eat this bread and drink this cup you show the Lord's death till He come." I'll tell you how often you do it, how often do you like to proclaim the death of Christ? How often would you like to declare His death? How often do you want to commune with His death? How often do you want to restate that pledge? That's how often. And when you do it, would you call My death into mind? Would you remember Me in the fullness of what that remembrance means? Call My death into mind?

Now you'll notice that it's not just a communion but it's a proclamation in verse 26. You're showing the Lord's death to the world. You're proclaiming it. The world looks at the communion and says, "What are they saying?" And somebody says, "Well, that's how they celebrate Jesus' death." That's right and we proclaim it and proclaim it and proclaim it to the world. If you're here this morning and you've never received Jesus Christ and appropriated His death, you've never believed that He is God incarnate, that He died a substitutionary atoning death for you, then you can hear the message that comes right off of this table this morning and commit yourself to Christ. I've heard of a couple people already who received Christ in the earlier service because the message came through. We proclaim here.

It's also as I said earlier eschatological, till He come, it says in 26. It keeps us looking forward to the day when we do it with Him. So it isn't a simple thing to come to the table. We remember what Christ has done. And then we call Him into conscious presence and we refresh our covenant and commitment with Him. We commune with the living Lord. We proclaim the gospel and we hope for His anticipated return all at this table. This is a special place. And when we come to it, Paul says we better come with special attitudes.

Let's see number three, the preparation for the Lord's supper. And we'll look quickly at this. The preparation for the Lord's supper, verse 27, "Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord anaxios or unworthily shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." He says, "Look, it's serious, it's important. If you treat this uncommon thing commonly, you become--literally--liable, that's the word guilty, for the body and blood of the Lord." If you come to this table wrongly, you're guilty of it.

What do you mean unworthily, John? Well, I'll tell how you can come unworthily. The Corinthians did it. You can come...here's...here's the way you can treat the table of the Lord unworthily. Number one, by ignoring it rather than obeying it, by just not doing it. You're saying it's irrelevant, it doesn't matter, it's unimportant. Is that right? No, it's wrong. That's unworthy of you and unworthy of Him. Second, you can treat the table unworthily by making it a performance rather than something meaningful, by just doing it rather than understanding it.

I'll tell you another way you can pervert the table and come unworthily is by making it into a saving thing rather than a communing thing...by thinking that it saves you to do it rather than understanding that it only causes you to make a fresh commitment and a fresh communion with Christ.

Another way that you can come unworthily is by treating it as a ceremony rather than as a personal experience. And another way you that you can come unworthily is by treating it lightly rather than treating it seriously. If you come to this table with any bitterness toward another Christian in any way, shape or form, with any unconfessed sin, living in any kind of sin that you will not repent of and turn from, if you come with any less than the loftiest thought about God, Christ and the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, if you come with anything less than total love for the brothers and sisters in the body of Christ, you come to this table unworthily.

And you say, "What's the result?" Look, you are liable for the body and blood of the Lord. You say, "John, what do you mean I'm liable for the body and blood of the Lord?" You contact guilt in reference to Christ. You literally are treating Him in an unworthy manner and you become guilty of that kind of ill treatment. You are treating the totality of Christ's life and death unworthily and you'll get guilt from that. In other words, God says you're guilty of that. You become culpable, liable, guilty. For example, a man who tramples the flag doesn't just trample the flag, he insults his country. He becomes guilty of dishonoring a nation. And somebody who tramples with the feet of indifference or sinfulness, the body and blood as represented in the elements of communion, is guilty of dishonoring, mocking, treating with indifference and hypocrisy the very person of Jesus Christ. How you treat this table, beloved, is how you are treating Jesus. That's what he's saying.

And that tells me that it's a very real encounter with Christ here. In fact, it's so real that failure to acknowledge the reality and seriousness of it brings about judgment.

So, what do you do? Verse 28, "Let a man examine himself and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup." The man's self-examination, look at your heart, is there anything there that shouldn't be there? The word here in the Greek means a rigorous self-examination...your life, your motives, your attitude toward the Lord, your attitude toward the Lord's supper, your attitude toward other Christians. Be certain you're not careless, flippant, indifferent, entertaining sin, unrepentant, mocking, all of that. And when you've examined yourself, then let him eat of the bread and drink the cup. Examination first.

Why? Because he that eats and drinks unworthily eats and drinks krima in the Greek, should be translated chastisement, it's not damnation. That's the worst translation I ever read of that. It means chastisement, katakrima means damnation, that's used in verse 32, krima is a less intense word, it means chastening. If you eat and drink unworthily, you will eat and drink chastening to yourself because you are not discerning the Lord's body. In other words, you're not treating the reality of Christ with seriousness and dignity and purity and holiness.

If you don't see the seriousness and the sacredness of the Lord's supper, communing with the body and blood of the very person of Jesus Christ, and you treat it with sinfulness, then you are literally guilty of His...of dishonoring Him, you become liable for chastening and you will be chastened because you have not thought seriously about what you're doing. You've not discerned the meaning and significance of the Lord's body. Now some would like to include in the term "the Lord's body" also the church, you're not considering seriously the church, the corporate body of Christ. That may be latent there but in the text the word "body" always refers to the Lord's actual body.

And the result of that kind of chastening, what does He do, how does God chasten us? Well, in Corinth this is what He did. Verse 30, "Because of this many are weak and sickly among you and many sleep," and "sleep" is a metaphor for death. The Lord said because of the Corinthians abuse of the Lord's table, some of them had gotten weak, they were mildly sick, some of them were very sick and some of them God had killed. And incidentally, the Greek says a sufficient number were dead. I don't know how many God killed in Corinth, but a goodly number.

Why did He kill them? What evil did they do? The evil of coming to the Lord's table in an irreverent manner. You get a little idea of the seriousness. I personally believe that Ananias and Sapphira who were executed by God for their sin were probably killed and executed at a communion service. That would be very, very stark, wouldn't it? They probably dropped dead at a communion service because that's what the early church did when it came together. And I'm not sure that it isn't true that some Christians today are weak, others are sick and some have even died because of how they treated the Lord's table, with indifference, sinfulness, whatever.

Now he says in 31, here's the remedy. "If you would judge yourself, you wouldn't be judged; if you'd examine yourself, you wouldn't end up being chastened." Self-examination drives you right back to verse 28, check your heart, check your motives. The Corinthians were being chastened by God because they wouldn't examine themselves, clean up their own life.

And verse 32, he throws in a beautiful verse, fantastic verse, wish we had more time as we've got to hurry. But somebody by now is going to say, "Oh, man, this is too much, brother. I can't handle this, I'm going to come to the table and if anything's wrong then zappo. I mean, I...I may wind up in hell, you know, what's the deal?"

I love this, "But when we are judged," he says, "we are chastened of the Lord, we are krima of the Lord that we should not be katakrima with the world." We are chastened by the Lord that we might not be damned with the world.

You want to hear something? No Christian, no time, under no circumstance will ever be damned with the world. People say, "Oh, does this mean I lose my salvation? Does this mean I'm lost?" No. You will never be damned with the world because short of that you will be...what?...chastened by the Lord. The worst thing that could ever happen to a Christian would be the ultimate chastening. And what's that? Take you to heaven. You say, "That's not too bad."

The point of the verse, a tremendous verse, the point of the verse is look, we are being chastened by the Lord in order that we would not be damned with the world. You say, "But maybe the Lord won't chasten me?" "Whom the Lord loves, He chastens and every son He scourges." Every Christian is under the chastening hand of the Lord which prevents him from ever being condemned with the world. Is that a great truth? So we have not that ultimate fear. I don't know about you, I'd just as soon be healthy, happy and alive for a little while so I want to check myself when I come to the Lord's table.

So then he closes in verse 33 and 34 by saying, "Look, you brothers, get that love feast straightened out, when you come together wait for each other." Remember last week? Don't gorge yourself before the poor get there so there's nothing for them. And if you're hungry, then go home and eat that you not come together and be chastened. And the rest of the problems I'll set in order when I come.

I don't know what the rest of the problems were but you can let your imagination run wild. All of this, beloved, to simply say that God is very, very serious about how the Lord's table is treated. As we share around it this morning, I trust you will examine your heart as I have mine. Let's pray.We'll ask our deacons to come as we pray and prepare to serve.

Father, thank You for speaking to our hearts, to my heart. I know there are some in our midst this morning who do not know Jesus Christ as Savior and who cannot partake unless they do. And, O Father, I would pray that right now you would open their heart to You, that right now they'd say, "Lord

Jesus, I want to eat Your flesh and drink Your blood, I want to accept Your incarnation and Your sacrificial death for me."

There are other Christians, Lord, who can't partake because of unconfessed, unrepented sin and bitterness and whatever. May they confess it now. May we examine our hearts and so let us eat and drink in Jesus' name. Amen.

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