

## **"DO THIS IN REMEMBRANCE"**

1 Corinthians 11:17-33

Stonebrook Sunday AM, 1/14/24, Matt Heerema

Please turn with me in your Bible to 1 Corinthians 11.

These past few weeks we have been looking at a few of the most foundational commands of Christ. We looked at his call to follow him, we looked at his command to be baptized, and today we are going to take a look at his command to remember him, specifically with a ritual meal he gave his followers to observe, which goes by a few names, typically communion, or The Lord's Supper in our circles.

This morning I'd like to talk about what we see communion being about, and I'd like to do that by going to the Scriptures, rather than some secondary source, to take a look at what the Bible has to say clearly about communion.

I think for all the differences out there in church traditions, I think there are really only two ways to go wrong: to overcomplicate what communion is and means, or to oversimplify it. In our church's history I believe we have made the second error, or at least that's the error we're most in danger of making.

So let's take a look at the longest and clearest explanation of communion that we see in the Scriptures and take a look at how the apostle Paul addresses a church that is doing it wrong, to see the kinds of things that concern him. It's in the corrections that he gives the Corinthian church that we find out what we should be concerned about when it comes to communion.

Read with me.

### **1 Corinthians 11:17-33 (CSB)**

17 Now in giving this instruction I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. 18 For to begin with, I hear that when you come together as a church there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. 19 Indeed, it is necessary that there be factions among you, so that those who are approved may be recognized among you. 20 When you come together, then, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. 21 For at the meal, each one eats his own supper. So one person is hungry while another gets drunk! 22 Don't you have homes in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I praise you? I do not praise you in this matter!

23 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took bread, 24 and when he had given thanks, broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." 25 In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

27 So, then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sin against the body and blood of the Lord. 28 Let a person examine himself; in this way let him eat the bread and drink from the cup. 29 For whoever eats and drinks without recognizing the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself. 30 This is why many are sick and ill among you, and many have fallen asleep. 31 If we were properly judging ourselves, we would not be judged, 32 but when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined, so that we may not be condemned with the world. 33 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, when you come together to eat, welcome one another.

## WAKE UP

The first thing we see in this passage is a wake-up call. Paul has been building to this moment in a few previous chapters. He needed to address the cliques and factions in the church. Probably specifically what was happening here were the rich, popular, powerful, and upper-class Christians snubbing the poor and lower class.

Part of the worship of the early church seemed to be a common meal shared together in connection with the worship service. The church would gather in the larger homes of the wealthier Christians so that they could all fit inside, and it is likely that they had to spread out among different overflow rooms, and of course birds of a feather flock together.

It seems that there was some plotting going on so that the popular crowd would get there ahead of time and eat all the food and drink all the wine, and those that actually needed food at this time because they couldn't afford it for themselves were left to go without.

And Paul calls a "technical foul" and a "time out." - "You think you are celebrating the Lord's Supper, but you are not." He specifically calls out selfishness and favoritism. This would have been a bucket of cold water on those believers, and probably especially for the pastors in the congregation. Paul says "step back and take a look at what's going on. Is this what Jesus wanted us to do when he gave us these instructions?"

So it would be appropriate for us as a church, and all of us as individuals to snap out of our habits and assumptions from time to time and ask ourselves “is how I am approaching this time of worship with my brothers and sisters, honoring to Jesus?”

## EXAMINE YOURSELF

At the end of the passage Paul calls each one who is about to participate in communion to examine themselves. I’ve heard this taught in various ways, it is usually taught as an individualistic thing to search your soul to make sure you don’t have any unconfessed sin and so are “unworthy” to take communion, but I don’t think that’s what its about. What does Paul say? He calls out two things:

**Recognize the body:** This is a packed statement. Paul is calling us, as we hold the bread and cup, to recognize the body of Christ. Meaning, recognize your brothers and sisters around you. About how different each one is from you, ethnically, socioeconomically, academically, personality... each of us, though diverse in many ways, are part of the same body. I think we’re also meant to recognize the thing that makes us part of the body, as we consider the bread and cup in our hands... Jesus’s work for us made us into this body.

**Properly judge yourself:** We are a great sinner, deserving of an eternity in hell, and yet here we stand, forgiven by Jesus’s sacrifice for us. Just like every other Christian.

The thing that makes us worthy is not our thorough confessing of our sins and cleaning ourselves up and behaving properly... ..it is our recognition of our need for the sacrifice we are remembering with this symbolic meal that makes us worthy.

This proper recognition and self judgement humbles us, and leads us to welcome one-another to the table, and leads us to be excited to invite others to the table with us as well.

## REMEMBER JESUS

Having woken up, and examined ourselves, what are we to then do? We are to boldly share in the bread and cup together. We are to do so in remembrance of Jesus. “In remembrance of” is an important phrase.

In remembrance of, not “in memory of.” Let me try and explain the difference. This is about reenactment not recollection. Think of a wedding anniversary for instance. “In memory of” would be like me sitting in my office looking at one of my wedding pictures. I’d probably have a few

sentimental feelings for a moment. I might even put the picture on a frame on my desk. But “in remembrance of” is going to our favorite restaurant together and spending the evening enjoying each-other’s presence and celebrating together.

In communion, we aren’t to sit here and just think real hard about what Jesus did. We’re to commemorate it. To celebrate it. To be together with the one we are remembering. We aren’t toasting someone who is absent, we are all, together, celebrating someone who is with us, in fact we’re here together cheering for the host of the meal, the one who is feeding us!

## PROCLAIM JESUS’S WORK

We are to “proclaim Jesus’s death until he comes”, Paul says. But he doesn’t mean to have a funeral. Proclamation is an energetic word! We are to declare the fact that the sacrifice has happened once for all! That all the debt has been paid! That the captives are now free! Sinners are now forgiven!

And we are supposed to keep this up until he comes to finally have the wedding feast together with every Christian from all over the world, throughout time. This meal is a preview and a preparation for that great day that we are placing all our hope in.

Communion is a party! A very serious party celebrating a very serious thing.

## WHO, HOW, AND WHEN?

Different churches differ on who should be allowed to take communion. It goes from one extreme of “just anyone, without any sort of checking at all. I’ll just leave the pile of bread here and if you want to, go ahead and take it!” at one end, to membership AND a personal interview the day before or morning of required to be allowed to participate. (Those are both real and historic examples.)

Here at Stonebrook we practice what is called an **“open table.”** By that we mean that we do not require you to be a formal member of Stonebrook Church in order to participate with us, but rather we have only one requirement: we welcome all **baptized believers** to participate with us.

Why do I say “baptized believer” - I explained last week. (It’s a redundant statement really.) Every Christian should be baptized as soon as possible after coming to faith in Jesus, and communion is for believers only. Baptism is the historic means of professing your faith in Jesus, and you should profess faith before joining in with communion.

If you do profess faith, but haven't been baptized, my counsel to you would be to put first things first, and let's get a baptism scheduled! Don't put it off. As we discussed last week, baptism is an act of obedience to Christ. Don't ignore him in one area and selectively choose to obey him in another.

**Bread and wine (juice is fine)** Can we just use anything? I don't think so. There are too many beautiful ties and cross-references to bread and wine throughout the scriptures. This meal is meant to bring those things to mind, all the way from Genesis all the way through Revelation. We are to see this communion meal, The Lord's Supper, everywhere throughout the Scriptures. Doritos and orange soda would disconnect the symbol in too many important ways. (I'm not saying you have sinned if you did that. But I am saying you are committing the error of oversimplifying the significance of The Lord's Supper.)

Also, I keep saying wine while we use grape juice here. That's intentional. But grape juice is a fine concession given the complexities in our christian subculture around alcohol this past century since the prohibition movement. Just think of it as alcohol-free wine. That's why Welch's grape juice was invented.

**Often (weekly? monthly? no prescription.)** The Scripture does not give us a prescription on how often to celebrate The Lord's Supper. However, this is an area that I think we might be off in as a church that might need some examination. The earliest traditions, and some scriptures seem to indicate an example that the early church celebrated The Lord's Supper weekly. Most churches around the world still do. But, frequency is crucial, and monthly is fine (for now.) We used to never do it on Sunday, and only in small groups, so we're making progress. But we should celebrate the Lord's supper frequently, and why wouldn't we, given how beautiful a picture it is!

## THE ULTIMATE SERMON ILLUSTRATION

In short, The Lord's Supper, Communion, Eucharist, The Breaking of Bread—(all are names that come from the scripture, most of them from the passage we read today)—is like the ultimate sermon illustration.

The bread representing Jesus's physical body, tortured and broken in punishment for sins he did not commit, we did, but he was glad to take that punishment for us. The wine representing his blood, spilled as an atoning sacrifice, the required payment for the debt we incurred in our sin. Freely given for us, so that we could be restored to relationship with Him.

For the Christian, the practice of frequently pausing to reflect on the state of your soul, the beautiful reality of all your brothers and sisters around you, and most especially, the host of the meal, Jesus himself, is one of the most significant of all the spiritual disciplines. Let's not underplay it or oversimplify it, and let's not overcomplicate it.

Baptism is a powerful physical symbol, meant to be experienced **once** as a marker of our death to our old way of life and entry into a new resurrected life with Jesus in His Body the church. But The Lord's Supper is a powerful physical symbol meant to be experienced a thousand times!

Let's close our service by celebrating it together.

Pray with me.