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Sermon Notes

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The Sacredness of the Lord's Supper

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

We come to perhaps the second most famous part of the epistle to the Corinthians... with only the "love chapter" (1 Corinthians 13) being more famous

But every Christian who has ever attended the Lord's Supper has heard the words of institution that Paul cites here:

1 Corinthians 11:23-25 The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

This is one of the two ordinances established by our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ that we must obey. "Ordinances" = that which was ordained by Jesus Christ: baptism, and the Lord's Supper

In this part of 1 Corinthians, Paul addresses some very serious issues with the Corinthians' behavior around the Lord's Supper, and in so doing helps us to understand the sacredness of this Christian ordinance, and how important it should be in the life of every Christian, and in the life of our church

I. Centuries of Division over a Meal that Unites

A. The Corinthian Division is a Sad Reality

1 Corinthians 11:18 I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it.

1. As we saw in chapter 1... the Corinthians riddled with divisions

2. So it was from the very beginning, the night Jesus was arrested

Luke 22:24 a dispute arose among them as to which of them was considered to be greatest.

3. So it has been in every generation of the church... a meal Christ intended to unite us has actually been the cause of division!

B. Four Views from the Time of the Reformation

1. View #1: The Roman Catholic view: Transubstantiation

- a. They took literally Jesus' statement "This is my body" and believed that eating Jesus' body and drinking his blood was essential to our salvation
- b. By the mystery of transubstantiation, they felt they were literally doing that
- c. What is transubstantiation? Philosophical underpinnings came from the pagan philosopher Aristotle, whom medieval educated Catholics revered as the father of all human knowledge
- d. Aristotle taught that everything in the universe has both an essential substance—its true nature—and then something he called "accidents", which were the way that thing communicated itself in the five-sense world; the way it looked, felt, tasted, sounded, smelled
- e. Catholic theologians took that idea and applied it to the Lord's Supper; they said that Christ had the power to CHANGE the substance of the bread and wine into his actual body and blood, while the accidents (the way they tasted, looked, smelled, felt) did not change at all. This is the concept of TRANS-SUBSTANTIATION
- f. This doctrine was a Catholic mystery of faith, and had to be accepted as dogma; to refuse to take the Lord's Supper was to condemn your soul to hell; to be refused the Lord Supper by excommunication was extremely serious; damning to the soul

- g. They believed only an ordained priest could make this miraculous transubstantiation; when it happened, the altar boys rang bells so the people would know it had happened
 - h. The Roman Catholic church considered the Mass to be the central matter of the life of a Catholic; they considered any assault on the doctrine of transubstantiation to be damnable heresy, and the medieval Roman Catholic hierarchy burned people at the stake for denying that doctrine
2. View #2: Martin Luther's "consubstantiation"
- a. Martin Luther was an Augustinian monk trained to be a priest
 - b. The high point of his training was the performance of his first mass; he was so overcome by terror at that moment that he actually spilled some of the wine on the white tablecloth
 - c. He never lost his sense of the holiness of the Lord's Supper and believed in the real presence of Christ with the elements of the Lord's Supper till his dying day... BUT he denied that the pagan Aristotle's philosophical idea of transubstantiation should be employed to explain such a holy mystery
 - d. He fervently believed Jesus' words "This IS my body" should never be reduced to "This represents my body"; but he did not know HOW that transformation happened
3. View #3: Ulrich Zwingli's "Bare Memorial" view
- a. Swiss reformer in Zurich; also started as a Roman Catholic priest; around the same time as Martin Luther
 - b. Began teaching through the Greek New Testament and believed it was time to get back to the Bible in all respects; stripped the Sunday worship time of all non-biblical things... all statues, rituals, music, artwork... extreme austere simple life of Christian worship
 - c. For the Lord's Supper, he believed in a "bare memorial" view... it was simply a ritual that helped us remember Christ's life and

death; he greatly reduced the number times they observed it... perhaps as rare as twice a year

- d. Practically speaking, many evangelical churches today have a similarly low view of the Lord's Supper; they do it quarterly at a sparsely attended Sunday evening service with very little fanfare or emphasis; members of such churches can easily go years and years as members in good standing without partaking in the Lord's Supper

Note: in 1530, Martin Luther and Ulrich Zwingli met at a place called Marburg to try to work out their differences on the Lord's Supper; the meeting was a disaster! Luther wrote the words "This is my body" on a table with chalk and pounded the words again and again; Zwingli was also stubborn and belligerent. In the end, Luther said to Zwingli, "You and I have a different spirit" ... saying Zwingli was not really a Christian

4. View #4: Calvin's "Spiritual Presence" view (my view)

- a. John Calvin was a French reformer who fled for his life a few years after Luther began the Protestant reformation
- b. Settled in Geneva; began systematically teaching bible passages and to weave them together into a careful system of theology
- c. Concerning the Lord's Supper, he held it in the highest honor in his mind, and at one point, he risked his life to defend the holiness of the table from some Libertines who had been excommunicated from the church for immoral lifestyles; though he was a small, frail man, he blocked the table and put his arms around it, rather than to allow it to be defiled by people living such wicked lives and who had no reverence for the Lord
- d. BUT he denied real presence; he did not teach that the bread became the body and the wine became the blood of the Lord
- e. Rather, he believed in something we could call "spiritual presence"... that the Holy Spirit is moving and working whenever the Lord's Supper is rightly administered by faith and

received by faith; similar to a sermon, it has power in proportion to your faith

- f. If you come to the Lord's Supper with faith, recognizing the body and blood of Christ by faith we will receive a powerful spiritual benefit; spiritual strength will flow into our souls by faith in the Word of God
- g. So while we should **reject real presence**, we should **also reject the "bare memorial"** view... I yearn that each of us should come to the table with a living, powerful faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, and a sense of expectancy that the Holy Spirit will use the Lord's Supper to enrich us powerfully

II. The Context of the Lord's Supper

A. The Passover Meal

1. The setting of the original Lord's Supper was the Jewish observance of the Passover in the Old Covenant
2. Once a year, the Jews would gather in their homes and remember the night of the dreadful Tenth Plague in Egypt; the night the angel of death moved through all of Egypt and slaughtered all the first born in the land
3. To protect his people that night, God commanded them through Moses to take a lamb and slaughter it at twilight and take a bushy hyssop branch and paint the blood of the Lamb on the doorposts and lintels of their homes
4. The Jews were commanded not to go outside their homes that night until the angel of death had PASSED OVER them... hence the term Passover
5. There was a clear link between their salvation that night and the angel of death SEEING THE BLOOD of the Lamb
6. That very night, when all the Egyptians were mourning the loss of their firstborn, they drove the Jews out of Egypt into their freedom
7. God commanded the Jews as a lasting observance to commemorate that night with the Passover observance; the slaughter of the Lamb,

the sprinkling of the blood, the eating of unleavened bread... all of it was to REMIND the Jews of their deliverance from slavery in Egypt and their salvation from death by the blood of the Lamb

B. Jesus Transformed that Meal Forever

1. That very night, while they were eating the Passover meal, Jesus took bread, broke it and said, **“Take and eat; this is my body.”**
2. Then after they were done eating, he took a cup of wine, gave thanks and offered it to them, saying

Matthew 26:27-28 "Drink from it, all of you. ²⁸ This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.

3. By these amazing actions, he transformed the Passover forever, replacing it with this simple two-part supper
4. The words “this is my blood of the covenant” signified the end of the Old Covenant forever

1 Corinthians 11:25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood

The NEW COVENANT... sets aside the OLD COVENANT, which was founded on animal sacrifice

Hebrews 10:4 it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.

C. Christ Fulfilled the Imagery of the Passover by His Death on the Cross

1. At the mount of transfiguration, Moses and Elijah came to Jesus, and Luke 9:31 tells us they were speaking of his “departure” (lit. his EXODUS) which he was about to perform in Jerusalem
2. By his death on the cross, Jesus would fulfill the symbolism of Passover; from then on, he wanted his people to look back on his own death and the salvation from sin it brought

III. The Facts of the Lord's Supper

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴ and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

A. Paul Said He Received this "from the Lord" (by revelation, like Gal. 1)

B. He Also Passed It onto Them

1. When he came to Corinth and preached the gospel, he included this in the doctrines that he considered essential to the life of the church
2. This is a very serious thing, overpowering in holiness and gravity... Jesus himself taught it to Paul, and Paul taught it to them

C. Walking Through the Words We Have Heard Already

1. **Vs. 23 "The Lord Jesus..."**: Paul emphasizes the Lordship of Jesus, which always means his deity
2. **"on the night he was betrayed"**: remembering the tragedy of Judas's treachery... he who was one of the Twelve, that very night, partook in the Lord's Supper, then left and betrayed Jesus

John 13:18... this is to fulfill the scripture: 'He who shares my bread has lifted up his heel against me.

- a. A warning to all of us... it is no small thing to partake in the Lord's Supper, then get up to betray him by how we live
3. **Vs. 24 "Took bread, and when he had given thanks"**: the Greek verb for "giving thanks" is *eucharisteo*... from which we get the word "eucharist"... Jesus looked upward to God when he fed the 5000; every good gift comes from the Father; so also the gift of Jesus' body and blood comes down from God the Father

4. **“He broke it”**: The breaking of the bread is symbolic of the death of Christ in order to feed his people; but we must emphasize that Jesus’ bones were never broken
5. Jesus’ words: **“This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.”**
 - a. In John 6, Jesus said he gave his flesh for the life of the world
 - b. The GIVING of the body of Jesus is total, from the Father and from the Son... nothing is withheld

Romans 8:32 He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all

John 6:51 I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

- c. **“Do this in remembrance of me”**... words carved into communion tables all over the world
- d. Just like the Passover, we are supposed to LOOK BACK and REMEMBER what Jesus did... what our salvation cost; our forgetfulness is one of the great curses of our sin nature

Psalm 78:40-43 How often they rebelled against him in the desert and grieved him in the wasteland!... ⁴² They did not remember his power-- the day he redeemed them from the oppressor, ⁴³ the day he displayed his miraculous signs in Egypt

6. Vs. 25 **“In the same way, after supper he took the cup”**: the second element of the Lord’s Supper was established at the same time ... Jesus, with his hands holding it, with his eyes looking at each of them, with his voice speaking
7. Saying **“This cup is the new covenant in my blood”**:
 - a. This new covenant is alone what saves us
 - b. The blood of animals could never cleanse us from sin

- c. BUT the blood of Jesus Christ, the infinite and eternal Son of God, poured out for us on the cross ONCE FOR ALL is infinitely sufficient to atone for all your sins and mine and the sins of all of God's people in every era of history
8. **“Do this, whenever you drink it”**: the drinking of the cup, like the eating of the bread, means a full participation in Christ by faith; just as food literally does you no good unless you chew it and swallow it, so Christ's death will not avail you at all unless you take it in by faith... his death becomes your death
 9. **“In remembrance of me”**: again, this second element is to bring to mind the bloody cost of our salvation

Hebrews 9:22 without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.

- a. So, we are to think of the painful death of the Son of God for us
 - b. We are to be moved, sometimes to tears, by the love that Jesus showed for you personally, the blood he poured out for you
10. **Vs. 26 “For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death”**:
 - a. Proclaim = preach... announce loudly... for all to hear and see
 - b. There is a preaching aspect to the Lord's Supper... lost people, watching it, can learn key elements of the gospel
 11. **“Until he comes”**:
 - a. There is a future orientation to the Lord's Supper
 - b. This is a temporary observance... we will not do it in the New Jerusalem

Matthew 26:29 I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom.

- c. So after the Second Coming of Christ, this image... like Passover itself... will be fulfilled

d. Instead, we will feast with Jesus and the redeemed in heaven

Matthew 8:11 I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.

IV. The Abuse of the Lord's Supper

1 Corinthians 11:27 Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.

A. The Corinthians Were Greatly Abusing this Sacred Observance

1. They were actually guilty of **sinning against the body and blood of the Lord**
2. The seriousness of the Lord's Supper is shown by what Paul is saying here
3. It is very possible to eat and drink in an unworthy manner

B. How Were They Abusing It?

1. We've already seen their factions and divisions (chapter 1)

1 Corinthians 11:18 I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it.

2. Their prideful arrogance meant that their assembling together for public worship, including the Lord's Supper, was actually **HARMING THEM**, when it should have been doing them good!
3. Paul does not deny that there must be differences among them... different gifts, difference offices, different genders (male and female) with different roles to play... certainly

1 Corinthians 11:19 No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval.

4. But they were going so far in their prideful demeanor toward each other... especially in the actual eating and drinking of the bread and wine... some arrogant bullies were going ahead of everyone

and gorging themselves; some were even getting DRUNK on the Lord's Supper wine

1 Corinthians 11:20-21 When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, ²¹ for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk.

5. Paul says you don't understand the purpose of this symbolic spiritual meal... it is NOT to FILL YOUR BELLIES!!

1 Corinthians 11:22 Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not!

- a. It seems some of the bullies and dominant ones were wealthier than the poorer ones
- b. So they flaunted their wealth and privilege and gorged themselves and left nothing for poorer members

C. Paul's Shocking Revelation of the Lord's Discipline

1 Corinthians 11:27 Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.

1 Corinthians 11:28-30 A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. ²⁹ For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. ³⁰ That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.

If anyone eats the Lord's Supper in unbelief, arrogantly, or flippantly, Paul says that person is actually eating and drinking judgment on himself!

What does it mean to "recognize the body of the Lord"? First of all, it means to genuinely be trusting in the death of Christ for your sins... to have repented and trusted in Christ; secondly, it means to recognize that this Christian ordinance is powerfully attended by the Holy Spirit of God, representing Christ himself

If you come at it as an unbeliever and irreverently or pridefully, you are actually eating and drinking judgment on your own life!

Paul shocks us by revealing that, for this reason, a number of the Corinthians church had actually DIED... and others had gotten sick or were WEAK as a result!

Perhaps they didn't know that was what was happening. Maybe they thought it was just as coincidence

But this is one of the scariest verses in the New Testament on the Lord's discipline

Sometimes, the Lord actually KILLS sinning Christians as an act of his discipline.

And to think that he does that in connection with the Lord's Supper ought to shock us all into the seriousness of the ordinance

V. The Sacred Observance of the Lord's Supper

How, Then, Should We Properly Partake?

A. First, Make Certain That You Are a Christian

1. Recognize the body and blood of Jesus Christ was given on the cross for YOUR sins
2. Testify to that by water baptism... the other of the ordinances
3. We Baptists believe that the Lord's Supper is a CHURCH ordinance, not to be observed privately, but in the assembly

B. Second, Be Serious About the Lord's Supper

1. Come to it reverently... not because the Body and Blood of Jesus are physically here, but because the Spirit of Christ is here

C. Examine Yourself Before Partaking

1 Corinthians 11:28 A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.

1. Be certain that you are in the faith
2. Ask the Lord to show you your sins

Psalm 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. ²⁴ See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

3. Whatever sin the Lord reveals to you, deal with it as soon as possible... JUDGE YOURSELF, so that the Lord will not have to do it

1 Corinthians 11:31-32 But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. ³² When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.

4. This is a key principle in the Lord's discipline; if we take our sins very seriously... if we cut off our right hand and throw it away if it is leading us into sin, then the Lord won't have to discipline us
5. The ultimate goal is that we will not be condemned to hell with the rest of the world

D. Come to the Table Joyfully and Expectantly

1. The overall tone should be one of joyful faith
2. Expect that the Holy Spirit will bless you
3. Expect that he will move you, perhaps even to tears, with the fullness of what Christ has done for you
4. Look forward to the Second Coming of Christ as you do... think about what it will be like to eat and drink with him and with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven
5. Do not be so overwhelmed by your sin that you think "I can't participate."

Scottish pastor, administering the Lord's Supper, saw a young woman trembling and weeping. He knew the circumstances and that she was a genuine believer, overwhelmed by her

brokenness as a sinner. He said to her, "Take it, lassie... it's for sinners."

E. Remember Your Brothers and Sisters as You Do

1 Corinthians 11:33-34 So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other. ³⁴ If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment. And when I come I will give further directions

1. We realize that we are not the only ones partaking
2. We are part of a family that God is saving