

The Lord's Table (Part 2)
1 Corinthians 11:17-34
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A couple of weeks ago, in anticipation of our taking the Lord's Table together today, I broke away from the book of Ephesians for us to take a look at this ordinance that the Lord gave to His church. If you've been a part of our church for any time at all you've heard some of the truths that I shared with you a couple of weeks ago and will share with you today. But I wanted to bring them together at one time and in one place so that we're clear as we celebrate, each month, the Lord's Table.

Jesus Christ our Lord gave His Church two ordinances. By ordinance we simply mean a right or a ceremony that He commanded us to do. The first of those two ceremonies occurs only once in the life of a believer, it's baptism. It is an initiatory right. It is to occur shortly after a person's conversion. The other is the Lord's Table and it is a ceremony that is to be repeated often. Here at our church we do it each month. But we're commanded to do it often.

In preparation for taking the Lord's Table together today we've been studying 1 Corinthians 11 and I invite you to turn there with me again this morning. First Corinthians 11 is filling out our understanding of this wonderful and sacred ceremony. We began to look at it two weeks ago and today I want us to complete our study together. Let me read it for you again, 1 Corinthians 11 beginning in verse 17,

But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part I believe it. For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you. Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper, for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you. For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; 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." In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

If we were to summarize that passage of Scripture we could say that Paul wants us to understand that the Lord's Table is a crucial part of the corporate worship of the church because our Lord Himself commanded it. And every individual Christian must understand how it's to be celebrated, what it means, and even how to rightly prepare to take it.

Now, the last time we studied this passage together we addressed the first two issues that Paul addresses here. We looked, in verses 17 to 22, at the corruption of the Lord's Table, the corruption. What had happened in Corinth to corrupt this simple ceremony? And I won't rehearse all of that again. I encourage you, if you weren't here, to go back and, sort of, catch up because I'm going to build on what I taught a couple of weeks ago, this morning.

But just to remind you, the church worshipped on Sunday as we do today, but it was a work day for people in the Roman Empire. So they met before sunrise briefly and then they met after the work day was done. And the wealthy would gather at their homes because that's typically where the services were held, in the larger homes. And they would get there first, they would have a wonderful meal to eat, and then the workers and slaves would arrive later, have really no place to eat and really nothing to eat. So that some had nothing, Paul says, and others were so satiated that they were actually becoming drunk. They were sinning against other brothers and sisters at the Lord's Table. At the end of that love feast they would take the Lord's Table and so it became something other than the Lord's Table, Paul says. You think it's the Lord's Supper, but it's not. That was the corruption.

We looked, secondly, last time at the institution of the Lord's Table. That is, when and how our Lord instituted this ceremony for us to celebrate. Today, we come to the third issue that Paul addresses in regard to this matter of the Lord's Table. It is the implications in the Lord's Table, the implications that are wrapped up in this ceremony.

Both of the ordinances that Christ gave His church, baptism and the Lord's Table, theologians call signs. When we say that they are signs we mean they are visible markers that point to something else. This morning when you came on the church property, whether you came through the cul de sac or you came off of the road off of 114, you probably saw the church sign. That sign is not Countryside Bible Church. That sign is merely a visible marker that points to the reality that is the church. You are the church, not the building in which we meet. We together are Countryside Bible Church and the signs are visible markers pointing to that spiritual reality. This is where the church meets.

In the same way, the Lord's Table is a visible sign that points to several great spiritual realities. Before we look at the spiritual realities, let's make sure we understand the visible signs themselves, the markers if you will, or the elements that we should use. Notice in the passage I read for you, Paul simply calls the two signs here, bread and the cup. The bread was what our Lord used as part of the Passover celebration on that night that He was betrayed. In that celebration, the Jewish people did and still do use unleavened bread. They were commanded to

use bread without yeast, or unleavened bread, because they had to leave Egypt in a hurry. They didn't have time to mix yeast into the bread and let it rise and go through the whole process. They needed to cook it fast and get out of Egypt and so they eat unleavened bread as a reminder of that speedy exit out of Egypt.

But none of the four New Testament passages that command us to take this ordinance mention anything about the kind of bread we are to use. They simply say bread. It doesn't say if it's to be leavened or unleavened, yeast or not yeast. We use unleavened bread. In a little bit we'll take of these little wafers together. We use bread that's unleavened, without yeast, because we believe it best represents the reality that Christ's humanity was untainted by sin and that's fine. It's okay to do that, but understand that unleavened bread is not biblically required. It simply says bread and it does in all four cases that it occurs.

The other sign or visible element that's a part of this is simply called the cup. As we learned last time, this cup was the third of four ceremonial cups of wine that were drunk during the Passover celebration. It was the cup of redemption. It was the cup to remind them that God redeemed them out of Egypt and it became the cup to remind us that Jesus became our redemption.

We know that that Passover cup the disciples and Jesus used on that night of His betrayal, in the night He instituted this, was, as the rabbis prescribed, wine mixed with water. But again, in the four passages that record the institution of the Lord's Supper not one of them mentions the use of wine specifically. We know that historically, but the text itself doesn't tell us that; it simply refers to the cup.

Now, what have we discerned from this? That it's simply bread and the cup. Theologians conclude, and I think rightfully, that it's not crucial that the elements we use be exactly what the elements were on the night our Lord instituted it. In fact, it appears throughout early church history that the disciples used whatever bread was available for that particular meal. They used the beverage, which typically was, in that culture, wine or wine mixed with water. But the exact nature of the elements is not the issue.

That brings us then to the most important question. What do these signs, bread and the cup, mean? What do these signs signify? What are the spiritual realities to which these visible markers point? Well, before we look at what they do point to, what it does mean, I want to first make sure we understand what it does not mean because there's a lot of confusion about the Lord's Table in professing Christianity. And there are two specific things I want you to understand it does not mean that are very commonly held to in Christendom.

The first thing it does not mean is that we are eating and drinking the physical body and blood of Jesus Christ. It does not mean that we are eating and drinking the physical body and blood of Christ. This is taught by the Roman Catholic Church. Official Roman Catholic doctrine states that the bread and wine actually become the literal physical body and blood of Christ when the

priest pronounces, “This is My body.” The bread and wine, their doctrine teaches, still have the external physical properties of bread and wine. They look like bread and wine, they taste like bread and wine, they smell like bread and wine, but they are no longer bread and wine. They have, in the Mass, become something else.

By the way, just F.Y.I., the word Mass actually comes from the Latin word *missa* which means dismissal. It’s part of the phrase that the priest says at the end of the ceremony in Latin. He says, go, it is the dismissal, and the word mass comes from that word dismissal.

But here’s what the Council of Trent said happens in the Mass. This is Council of Trent 1551. By the way, this doctrine was reaffirmed by Vatican II so this is still the official doctrine of the Church. Here’s what it writes, “It has always been a firm belief in the Church of God,” that’s not exactly true, it actually began at about 600 A.D., “and this Holy Council now declares it anew that by the consecration of the bread and wine a change is brought about of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and the whole substance of the wine into the substance of His blood. This change the Holy Catholic Church properly and appropriately calls transubstantiation.” That is the doctrine of the Catholic Church. The bread and wine become the literal blood and body of Jesus Christ.

They base this view on two biblical arguments. The first argument is here in our text when Jesus says, “This is My body.” We’ll look at that phrase in just a moment, but let me go to the second proof they use, which is a passage in John 6. Turn there with me, John 6. I want you to see this because it’s a potentially confusing passage, but I think it’ll become very clear to you when you see it in its context. John 6:51, Jesus is here speaking to unbelieving Jews. He says,

“I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh.” Then the Jews begin to argue with one another, saying, “How can this man give us His flesh to eat?” So Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.”

Now, Roman Catholic doctrine argues that that passage I just read to you is about the Lord’s Table. That cannot be so, for a couple of reasons. First of all, because it destroys the context. Jesus is here not talking to His disciples, but to unbelieving Jews. That would mean Jesus is talking to unbelievers about an ordinance that he has not yet even commanded His followers to observe. Whatever Jesus is talking about in this passage, whenever a person eats His flesh in this sense and drinks His blood in this sense, look at verse 54, “he has eternal life.” Whatever this means, when you do it you have eternal life and Christ will raise you up on the last day. Even

Roman Catholic theology wouldn't say that taking the Lord's Table accomplishes that in and of itself.

So, what is Christ talking about in this passage? Look at verse 63, He explains, "It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the," watch this, "the words I have spoken to you are spiritual words and they are life-giving words." The words I'm telling you aren't physical, I'm not telling you, Jesus says, to literally eat my body, literally drink my blood. I'm talking to you in a spiritual sense. And if you look back in the passage you see that's true. Look back at verse 35, "Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.'" Do you see that here eating Jesus, if you will, and drinking Jesus is coming to Him and believing in Him. Verse 40, "'this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life.'" Verse 47, "'Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life.'"

So what's going on in this passage then? In these unusual words Christ is extending an invitation of the gospel to unbelieving people. He's saying, believe in Me. Find Me the person who slakes your thirst. Find Me the person who satisfies your hunger. They're spiritual words. He's not saying to physically eat Him and drink Him. He's not saying that bread and wine are going to turn into His body and blood, even though this is the passage that is used to teach that.

By the way, you know I appreciate and respect Martin Luther, the great reformer, and he got the gospel right. He got this wrong. Martin Luther rejected the Roman Catholic doctrine of the Mass, but he also thought "this is My body," that phrase, had to mean something literal. So his response was, yes, in the Lord's Table we do literally take of the Lord's body and blood. But it's not that it changes. Instead, His body and blood are in and under and around the real elements.

You say, what does that mean? I don't know, but here's the best illustration of it that Lutheran doctrine can give. It's the relationship of water and a sponge. Water and the sponge are not identical, but the water is in and around and through, mixed with the sponge. They would say that's how it is with the bread and wine, Jesus's literal body and blood are, sort of, in and under and present in the bread and wine. That Lutheran view is not called transubstantiation it's called consubstantiation. But folks, the Lord's Table is not eating and drinking Jesus's actual body and blood, whether it's taught by the Catholic Church as transubstantiation or by the Lutheran Church as consubstantiation, and we'll see that even more in a moment.

Let me give you one other thing the Lord's Table does not mean and is not. This is so important. It is not a repetition of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. This is also what Roman Catholic doctrine of the Mass teaches. And this is the most offensive of all. Those of you who have a Catholic background (In fact, just out of curiosity, how many of you were saved out of a Catholic background? Let me see your hands. A number of you.), you know that Roman Catholic doctrine of the Mass has at its heart this idea of a repeated sacrifice of Christ. Listen to Roman Catholic theologian Ludwig Ott, "The Holy Mass is a true and proper Sacrifice. The purpose of

the Sacrifice is the same as in the Sacrifice of the Cross. As a propitiatory sacrifice it effects the remission of sins and the punishment for sins.” So every time, Catholic doctrine teaches, every time the Mass is celebrated it is a repeated sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Folks, that is a blasphemy against the work of our Lord. It is a once for all completed work. Look at what the writer of Hebrews says in Hebrews 9. He couldn't make it any more clear. Hebrews 9:24, “Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a *mere* copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, to appear in the presence of God for us.” Verse 25, now watch this,

nor was it that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood that is not his own. Otherwise, Christ would have needed to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now once at the consummation of the ages He has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.

Verse 28, “Christ also, having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time for salvation without *reference* to sin, to those who eagerly await Him.”

Look at Hebrews 10:11, I read it this morning, “Every priest stands daily,” this is before the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D.,

Every priest stands daily ministering and offering time after time the same sacrifices. Those can never take away sins; but Christ, having offered one sacrifice for sins for all time, SAT DOWN AT THE RIGHT HAND OF GOD.

What a priest could never do, He sat down, symbolizing His work was completed. Verse 14, “For by one offering He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.”

Listen folks, Christ died once. He only needed one sacrifice. It was once for all, complete and full. To say that He needs to be sacrificed again and again and again to atone for sin is to blaspheme His perfect work. The true significance of the Lord's Supper looks back to a past historical event, once for all, not to some ongoing spiritual sacrifice. So, the Lord's Table then is not eating and drinking the literal body and blood of Christ and it is not a constant repetition of the sacrifice of Christ.

Now that we know what it's not, let's consider what it really means, what the Lord's Table signifies. What are the spiritual realities that the bread and the cup point to? Well, there are several of them, but let me just give you, briefly touch on a couple of them, so we can get to the most essential.

First of all, the Lord's Supper is a confession of our faith. It is a confession of our faith. If you were in Egypt and you were told that God would pass through, and the death angel, he would pass through and kill the first born of every house, how did you confess your faith in God's

Word? How would you have done that? Well, you would have killed the lamb. You would have applied its blood to the doorpost. You would have ate the Passover meal. You were saying, by doing those things, I believe that our God is a savior, a rescuer, and He will save me and my family.

When you and I take of the Lord's Table it is a confession of our faith in Jesus Christ. It is, in essence, saying this, by taking of this bread and the cup, which represents Christ's death, I am picturing the fact that I have personally received the spiritual benefits of His death. I am confessing that my faith is in Him and in Him alone.

There's a second spiritual reality. It is a means of spiritual nourishment. The reformers used to call it a means of grace. We never earn grace, but God determined there are means through which He will distribute or dispense that grace to us. This is to those who have already experienced His saving grace in the gospel. Now that we are Christians, now that we are followers of Christ, activities such as gathering for worship, reading the Scripture, prayer, and the Lord's Table become a means of the dispensing of that grace in our lives. It gets us spiritual nourishment as we reflect on our Lord and what He's accomplished for us.

There's a third spiritual reality in the Lord's Table and that is, it is a symbol of our fellowship with each other. Look back in 1 Corinthians 10. Paul mentions this, 1 Corinthians 10:16, as he deals with the Corinthians who wanted to go back to the idolatrous temples and have meals with them. He reminds them that to take of the Table of Christ is inconsistent with that. Verse 16,

Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of one bread.

The Greek word sharing there is the word *koinonia*; it means to become partners with, to be in the fellowship. Paul frequently uses this word in the same way that Tolkien used it in his book *The Fellowship of the Ring*, that group that bound themselves together with Frodo Baggins to destroy the Ring of Power. They were partners. They were in the fellowship of the ring. This word speaks of partnership, participation. Paul says here in 1 Corinthians 10, when you and I take of the Lord's Table we manifest the reality that we are in the fellowship. We are partners of one another. We're eating together.

But in verse 20 Paul goes further. Not only does it symbolize our partnership with each other, it symbolizes our fellowship in partnership with Christ. Because he says, in verse 20, that to drink the cup of demons is to have fellowship with demons and therefore to drink the cup of Christ is to be a sharer or to have fellowship in partnership with Christ. So the Lord's Table then is a symbol of our fellowship with one another as well as our fellowship with Christ. We are eating a common meal together, as it were. That's what it symbolizes.

There's a fourth spiritual reality to which it points. It is a seal of the New Covenant. When God made promises, legally binding promises, that's all a covenant is. It's like the covenant a couple makes when they get married. They make a legally binding promise to one another. God has made legally binding promises to us and when He makes those promises He seals them in some way to make sure we know they're certain.

Here in verse 25, notice what he says, "In the same way Jesus took the cup also after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood.'" The cup represented the spiritual reality of His blood poured out in death and that was the seal of the New Covenant. You say, what was the old covenant? It was the Mosaic Covenant, the covenant given at Sinai, which could show us our sin, but could never enable us to obey, never empower obedience. And so God promised a New Covenant in Jeremiah 31 and Jesus's bloody death as a sacrifice was God's seal on that New Covenant. I will keep my new legally binding promise to you.

You say, what is that legally binding promise? Read the end of Hebrews 8, because the writer of Hebrews brings in from Jeremiah 31 the New Covenant and the benefits of it that are ours in Christ. If you are a Christian, God has promised that He will empower you to obey Him, that He will take you as His own, and that He will forgive your sins. He has made legally binding promises in the New Covenant and the cup of the Lord's Supper points to Jesus's blood poured out in death and that bloody death ratified the New Covenant.

The fifth and final spiritual reality to which these signs point is a remembrance of our Lord. Here is the heart of what the Lord's Table really means. It is a remembrance of our Lord. Notice that both in conjunction with the cup and the bread, Jesus says, do it for this reason. Look at verse 24, "do this in remembrance of Me." Verse 25, "do this in remembrance of Me."

Now get the English word remember out of your mind, because when we think of remember we think of, we forgot something and now we remember it, but to remember in a biblical sense is quite different. To remember in a biblical sense is, as one scholar writing about the Lord's Supper says, "to transport an action which is buried in the past in such a way that its original power and vitality are not lost, but are carried over to the present." In other words, it means to relive the experience, to remake it our own.

For example, in the Jewish Passover Seder, which is still celebrated today, the presiding host at the Passover Seder will take the bread and he will say, "This is the bread of affliction which our fathers ate when they came out of Egypt." Now, that bread isn't the same bread they ate. That was 3,500 years before. But it's as if they're entering into it. They are linking to the past. They are reliving the experience of history. They are making it their own. That's what the Lord's Table does. That's what it means to remember.

So, what does the Lord's Table force us to remember about our Lord? He says, "do this in remembrance of Me." What do we remember? Well, there are, briefly, four pictures of our Lord that we're to remember, four snapshots that we remember in the Lord's Table.

Number one, His incarnation. Look at verse 23,

He took the bread and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body."

Now, this can't mean that the bread actually becomes His body, because look what He says about the cup, verse 25, "This cup is the new covenant." Obviously, Jesus didn't mean that that wine literally, physically became the New Covenant. Instead, He meant that the cup represented the New Covenant.

These are just normal Hebrew ways of speaking, figures of speech. Jesus said, "I am the door." Nobody thinks He's a literal door. Jesus said, "I am the true vine." Nobody thinks Jesus is a true vine. "I am the water of life." Nobody thinks Jesus is water. Those are images; they're pictures. He's sitting with His disciples, with His body intact, and He says, "this is My body." This represents My body.

Now, think about that for a moment. We've gotten over the shock of that statement, now in the 21st century, but it is shocking. The eternal Second Person of the Trinity said, this represents My body and My blood. What does that mean? That means He had a human body. And, in more than that, He took on full humanity. As you've heard me say many times if you've been a part of our church, Jesus became everything you are except for sin, and He still is. And in the Lord's Table we remember His incarnation. He had a body and blood. He had full humanity. He was and is one of us.

We also remember a second snapshot, His substitution. You see, in the Hebrew mind the body and blood referred to the two components you were left with after you made a sacrifice. When you sacrificed a lamb in Old Testament Israel you took the knife and slit that animal's throat and you held it until the blood poured out and now you had a body and you had blood. That was a sacrifice. And so the picture here in the Lord's Table is the picture of an innocent victim laying down His life as a substitute for the guilty. That is the constant affirmation of Scripture.

Second Corinthians 5:21, "God made Christ who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf." He was the innocent substitute. He died in the place of every sinner who would ever believe. First Peter 3:18, "Christ died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God." He didn't die for His own sins. He was just. He died for the unjust so that we could come to God. Galatians 3:13, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us."

Listen, if you're here this morning and you're not a believer in Jesus Christ, maybe you know about Him, you've been attached to the church your whole life, you prayed some prayer when you were a kid, but you are not a follower of Jesus Christ. You need what is offered in the Lord's Table, you need the reality of substitution. You need somebody to suffer the wrath of God in your place. Either Christ will suffer it on your behalf or you will suffer it forever. That's the teaching of Christ and the Scripture. That's the amazing reality of substitution.

Paul links the Lord's Table with our Lord dying as a substitute. Look in verse 26, he says, "you proclaim the Lord's death," not just the fact that He died, but why He died. Look at what Jesus said about the bread, verse 24, "This is My body, which is for you." Whenever Paul uses this Greek word translated for in reference to Christ it always speaks of His death on our behalf, His death in our place. As Luke quotes Christ in Luke 22, "This is My body which is given for you," a substitute.

The New Testament also connects the cup with substitution. Luke 22, "This cup is poured out for you." Mark 14, "This is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many." Matthew 26, "this is My blood, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins." The cup teaches substitution, the innocent one dying in the place of the guilty. When we take of the Lord's Table we remember His incarnation. We also remember His substitution, the perfect one dying in the place of the guilty.

Thirdly, the third snapshot we remember is resurrection. Verse 26, "as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes." Notice the juxtaposition, "death," "He comes." What does that mean? That means He's alive. He died, but He's alive. He beat death. As He promised, He rose on the third day and He's now in the presence of the Father. When we take of the Lord's Table we're not just commemorating His death, we're commemorating the reality that He beat death. He died for sins as a substitute and then He was raised again on the third day. He's coming.

And that brings us to the fourth snapshot, the consummation. This is what we remember, the coming consummation. Verse 26, "you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes." He's going to come back and finish what He started. Luke 22, Jesus says, "I'll never again eat this meal with you until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God." So when we take of the Lord's Table together we're anticipating the day when, as the perfect bride of Christ, we will sit down at the wedding supper of the Lamb and we will literally eat and drink with Jesus Christ our Lord. Matthew 26, He says, there is coming "a day when I will drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." Same thing in Mark 14.

So that's the meaning of the Lord's Table. When we take it together it is a confession of our faith. It is a means of spiritual nourishment. It is a symbol of our fellowship, both with one another and with Christ. It is a seal of the New Covenant. And, most importantly, it is a remembrance of our Lord, of His incarnation, of His substitution, of His resurrection, and of the

coming consummation when He will bring it all to a close. Those are the implications in the Lord's Table.

That brings us lastly and very briefly to the preparation for the Lord's Table. Who should participate in the Lord's Table? Remember, it is, after all, a confession of faith. So it is only for those who truly believe in Him, only for true followers of our Lord. It is in remembrance of Him.

Now, let me answer a very practical question that people raise, what about children? How old do they need to be to partake of the Lord's Table? As a church we leave that for you parents to decide. But, clearly from the Biblical perspective, to take of this ordinance requires true faith in Jesus Christ, it requires an ability to understand the symbolism, and it requires a capacity to truly examine your own heart. That's why the Westminster Confession of Faith in the Larger Catechism writes, "It's only to such as are of years and ability to examine themselves." So this ceremony is only for believers.

But Paul goes one step further here in 1 Corinthians 11. He says, there are times when even believers should not take of the Lord's Table. Look at verse 27, "Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." In one sense we'll never be worthy, none of us will. But if we prepare ourselves properly we can take in a worthy manner. But if we don't prepare ourselves, Paul says, we share the guilt of those who killed Jesus. Notice he goes on in verse 28, "But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat the bread and drink of the cup." The way to eat in a worthy manner is to take of the Lord's Table only after you've first examined yourself. Notice verse 31, he says, "We are to judge ourselves rightly."

Let's ask the question the other way, how does one eat and drink unworthily? How do you incur God's judgment described in this passage? A couple of ways. First of all, by mistreating other believers. Taking the Lord's Table while you're mistreating others, that's what was going on here in Corinth. Remember? They were abusing each other. They were feasting and shutting out other believers. That's why in Matthew 5 Jesus said, "if you're bringing your offering to the Lord to worship and you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there, go be reconciled to your brother, and then come back and present your offering." Listen, if there are problems you have with other believers in this church or other believers period, don't you dare take of the Lord's Table.

Another way to drink unworthily, eat and drink unworthily is by failing to take seriously the symbolism in the elements. Look at verse 29, "he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly," if you don't really respect what those elements point to, the body and blood of Christ.

And, of course, the whole passage summarizes that we drink and eat in an unworthy way when we harbor unrepentant sin, when there is sin in our lives that's not dealt with before God. We are to judge ourselves. We're to examine ourselves. Here's what it comes down to, no sin, however great, excludes you from the Lord's Table if you are repentant. And no sin, however small, allows you to come if you're unwilling to repent of it. We are to examine ourselves and only then can we take in a manner that's worthy.

But if we celebrate the Lord's Table while we tolerate divisions with other believers, while we fail to take this whole event seriously, if we take of the Lord's Table without examining ourselves, while still refusing to repent of what we know to be sin, there are terrifying results. Look at verse 29, "you will eat and drink God's judgment to yourself." Verse 30, "There were many in the church in Corinth who were weak and sick and there were even some who had died." Why? Verse 32, they were being "disciplined by the Lord." It's a serious, serious thing. But you and I, if we are willing to confess our sin, to deal with the issues in our lives, to judge ourselves, then we will not face that judgment and we can remember our Lord together.

Our Father, we thank You that in Your perfect plan all of those Old Testament sacrifices were merely pictures of a great coming reality when You would accept the willing and voluntary sacrifice of Your own Son in our place. Father, we bless You for such grace. Don't let us ever get over, ever stop being amazed by Your grace, that You would have devised such a plan to save rebels against Your Law and against Your will, and to make your enemies, your friends. Thank You for the blood that washes us white as snow.

We bless You, O God. Help us to leave this place with the truths that we have both heard and participated in, sealed upon our hearts. Keep us near the cross. Help us to live with an awareness as it were, the very shadow of the cross of our Lord cast across our lives and may we live looking for His coming. We pray in Jesus's name, amen.