

November 9, 2014  
Strength at the Lord's Table  
1 Corinthians 11:17-34

Holy Communion, which we celebrated last week, is meant to be a very sacred, meaningful, and reverent experience.

We have two sacraments in the Church of the Nazarene. Baptism, usually a onetime celebration for believers and Holy Communion or the Lord's Supper which is celebrated many times by believers. A sacrament is an outward sign of inner and spiritual graces. O. A. Curtis said that, "each sacrament is a symbol of an event of grace. (*The Christian Faith*). A sacrament is a symbol of what Christ has already done for us and in us. Furthermore, It is a vehicle for the blessing of God and the impartation of spiritual power; a meeting place of the soul with God. And so Holy Communion, like Baptism is to be a very sacred experience.

The early church took Holy Communion every day, they still do in the Roman Catholic tradition. We are Wesleyan in our theology and John Wesley said you should take communion, "as often as you can."

Even with this issue Paul has to deal with the church in Corinth. The Corinthian Church was making a mockery of this very holy tradition of the church. Paul heard of the problem and addresses it here.

**(vv17-22)** But in the following instructions, I cannot praise you. For it sounds as if more harm than good is done when you meet together. First, I hear that there are divisions among you when you meet as a church, and to some extent I believe it. But, of course, there must be divisions among you so that you who have God's approval will be recognized!

When you meet together, you are not really interested in the Lord's Supper. For some of you hurry to eat your own meal without sharing with others. As a result, some go hungry while others get drunk. What? Don't you have your own homes for eating and drinking? Or do you really want to disgrace God's church and shame the poor? What am I supposed to say? Do you want me to praise you? Well, I certainly will not praise you for this!

In these verses Paul is talking about a problem related to an abuse of the observance of the Lord's Supper. This problem was so bad that he suggested that "it sounds as if more harm than good is done when you meet together." (v.17).

Since Holy Communion in the church today is usually celebrated in the context of a worship service in the sanctuary, it is hard for us to visualize the circumstances Paul was addressing here.

The early church had developed a very wonderful tradition in connection with the

observance of the Lord's Supper. They had a meal that was called a Love Feast. Each member brought some food they were able to share; Kind of a first century version of a pot luck supper.

The whole church sat down to a common meal which provided a beautiful picture of the oneness they shared in Christ. It was a way of creating and developing real Christian fellowship in the church.

Then, in connection with the meal, the Lord's Supper was celebrated. This had a certain naturalness to it since Christ had instituted the practice at the close of a meal - the Jewish Passover meal.

But there were several things that had happened in the Corinthian church to take away from the Love Feast whatever love it had and to create a situation so bad that Paul rebuked them strongly.

First of all, when they met, instead of being one family, they tended to divide up into separate groups. Paul mentioned how the richer members kept to themselves rather than share their food and have fellowship with those who were poor.

Also, there were some people who were having so much to drink that they were becoming drunk. In this atmosphere of disunity, gluttony, and drunkenness, where sharing had been forgotten, the church tried to celebrate the sacrifice God made in sharing His Son for our sins, and it was a mockery.

To Paul it made no difference if the right words were spoken and the right actions were performed if the condition of the church's fellowship and the spirit of its members stood as a contradiction to the true meaning of the Lord's Supper. Paul's method for correcting the abuse is to go back to the very beginning and to remind his readers of the Lord's Supper's institution and meaning. He reminds his readers how it all started and what its original purpose was. The Lord's Supper is meant to be a sacred time. We are meant to find strength at the Lord's Table:

1. The Lord's Supper was Given by the Lord (v23a)

For I pass on to you what I received from the Lord himself.

Paul received a revelation about the Lord's Supper, and what he received he now communicates to the church. The first thing we need to know and the first reason why there is strength at the Lord's Table is that the Lord Jesus Himself instituted the sacrament. Only Jesus as THE head of the Church has the power to institute sacraments. On the night that he had His last meal with His disciples, just before His arrest and trial Jesus Himself instituted the Lord's Supper.

2. The Lord's Supper is a Reminder of Christ's Sacrifice (v23b-26)

On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and said, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this to remember me." In the same way, he took the cup of wine after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood. Do this to remember me as often as you drink it." For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord's death until he comes again.

In instituting the sacrament of the Lord's Supper Jesus gave only two commands. To do it, and when we do, to remember Him. It is meant to keep fresh in our minds what Jesus Christ has done for us. Each time we take Communion the story is told once again; not only the story of what Jesus did at the end of a Passover meal with His disciples, but what He did for us by His sacrifice on the cross. We tell the story with a visual illustration. He took bread, blessed it, broke it and gave it to His followers with these words, "this is my body, which is given for you. Do this to remember me."

The church has debated the meaning of Christ's words, "this is my body." Some believe that the bread actually becomes His body and the wine actually becomes His blood (transubstantiation). Others believe that the bread and wine remain unchanged (it is still bread and wine and not the actual body and blood of Christ), but Christ is spiritually present with the bread and wine (consubstantiation). Still others believe that while certainly Christ is spiritually present with us as He always is whenever two or more gather in His name - the bread and wine symbolize Christ's body and blood (symbolization). This is what we believe, it is a symbol, since Jesus said, "Do this to remember me." It is a remembrance, a memorial, a symbol of the Lord and His sacrifice. Christians generally agree, however, that participating in the Lord's Supper is an important part of our Christian worship and that Christ's presence, however they understand it, is with us and strengthens us spiritually.

By eating "the body of Christ," or tasting of the goodness of the God's salvation, that is, by receiving Christ in to our lives, not by eating and drinking but through faith, believers receive the power and benefits of Christ's body broken for sin and glorified forever.

When Jesus said do this to remember me, He wanted us to remember His love for us and His loving sacrifice, through which we have fellowship with Him forever. He calls the cup, "the new covenant between God and His people." A covenant is a contract, or an agreement. Under the old covenant of God (or the old promise of God with His people before Christ came) the people could only come to God through the priests. God would forgive their sin when they brought an animal to the priest to be sacrificed. When this was done the agreement between God and His people was sealed by the blood.

#### Hebrews 9:22

In fact, according to the law of Moses, nearly everything was purified with blood. For without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.

But animal blood did not in itself forgive sin (only God can forgive sin). So, animal sacrifices had to be made day after day and year after year. The death of Jesus on the cross began a new covenant or agreement between God and humanity. Unlike the blood of animals, the blood of Jesus does actually remove sin for all who put their trust in Him. And His sacrifice does not need to be repeated.

Hebrews 9:25-26

(Christ) did not enter heaven to offer himself again and again, like the high priest here on earth who enters the Most Holy Place year after year with the blood of an animal. If that had been necessary, Christ would have had to die again and again, ever since the world began. But now, once for all time, he has appeared at the end of the age to remove sin by his own death as a sacrifice.

The New Covenant doesn't replace the old it fulfills it; it fulfills everything the old covenant was looking forward to.

Jeremiah 31:31-34

"The day is coming," says the LORD, "when I will make a new covenant with the people of Israel and Judah. This covenant will not be like the one I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand and brought them out of the land of Egypt. They broke that covenant, though I loved them as a husband loves his wife," says the LORD.

"But this is the new covenant I will make with the people of Israel on that day," says the LORD. "I will put my instructions deep within them, and I will write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. And they will not need to teach their neighbors, nor will they need to teach their relatives, saying, 'You should know the LORD.' For everyone, from the least to the greatest, will know me already," says the LORD. "And I will forgive their wickedness, and I will never again remember their sins."

The New Covenant in Christ blood fulfills this promise.

And then Paul says, "every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord's death until he comes again."

This means that the Lord's Supper looks two ways, it looks back to the past as we remember the sacrifice of Jesus and it looks to the future to when Jesus will come to earth again. Someone said Holy Communion is like a suspension bridge between the two comings of Christ.

Because the Lord's Supper is commemorated *in remembrance* of the body and blood of Jesus given for the redemption of sinful people, it must never be taken lightly.

### 3. The Lord's Supper Demands self-examination (v27- 32)

So anyone who eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord unworthily is guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. That is why you should examine

yourself before eating the bread and drinking the cup. For if you eat the bread or drink the cup without honoring the body of Christ, you are eating and drinking God's judgment upon yourself. That is why many of you are weak and sick and some have even died.

But if we would examine ourselves, we would not be judged by God in this way. Yet when we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned along with the world.

The Lord's Supper is to be celebrated in a reverent yet thankful manner. Paul says it is possible to eat the bread and drink the cup of the Lord in an unworthily manner. It means it can be taken in an unfit or irreverent manner, as the Corinthians were doing. The Greek word translated "unworthily" refers to a balancing of weights so it means "of unequal weight" or "improperly balanced." It is when the attitude of the person does not balance with the importance of the occasion. When someone takes the Lord's Supper without reverence and gratitude, or in a thoughtless or trivial manner they are guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. To treat the symbols of Christ's ultimate sacrifice irreverently is to be guilty of irreverence toward His body and blood shed on sinners' behalf.

In v28 Paul says that is why you should examine yourself before eating the bread and drinking the cup. Examine yourself for any unconfessed sin or any attitude of bitterness or resentment. But notice that Paul doesn't say to examine yourself and leave the Lord's Table in despair. Rather he wants you to search your heart, and then in honest faith eat the bread and drink the cup.

The Corinthians were not making a distinction between their regular meal and the Lord's Supper. They were not distinguishing between the sacred memorial of the Lord's Supper and other kinds of meals. They were guilty of dishonoring the body of Christ and therefore eating and drinking God's judgment upon themselves. It may even be the reason some of them were weak, sick, or even had died. Paul is not saying they were forever condemned or no longer saved. But he was talking about temporal judgment. But if we would examine ourselves we would not fall under judgment. The best way to avoid God's judgment is to voluntarily and truthfully judge ourselves. But even when God does judge us, we are being disciplined by His love, so not to be condemned along with the world.

#### 4. The Lord's Supper Produces concern for others (v33-34)

So, my dear brothers and sisters, when you gather for the Lord's Supper, wait for each other. If you are really hungry, eat at home so you won't bring judgment upon yourselves when you meet together. I'll give you instructions about the other matters after I arrive.

The purpose of coming to the Lord's Table is to remind us of the redemptive work of Christ and to bring a spirit of unity and love to the church.