

## The Lord's Supper in Biblical Perspective: Looking in Five Directions

I Corinthians 11

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*April 27, 2014 – Morning Sermon*

We are in a definitive text on the Lord's Supper. I Corinthians 11:17–34 says

[17] But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. [18] For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, [19] for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. [20] When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. [21] For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. [22] What! Do you not have houses 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 commend you in this? No, I will not. [23] For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when 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 also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "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] Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. [28] Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. [29] For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. [30] That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. [31] But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. [32] But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. [33] So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another— [34] if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for judgment. About the other things I will give directions when I come.

The grass withers, the flower fades, God's Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

As we come to the Table I'm going to ask you to do something that is only possible by the supernatural blessing of the presence of the Holy Spirit and I'm going to ask you to look in five directions. The eye is utterly amazing. All of our telescopes and microscopes are merely slight replications of the unbelievable instrument God has made for us to have sight through which we "look." That word look came into our English language in the ninth century and it means to turn the gaze of your eyes upon something in order to examine it or observe it.

As marvelous as our eyes are they are nothing in comparison to what Paul continually prays for. He prays that the eyes of our hearts would be enlightened. He is talking about another set of eyes. It is the eyes of our heart whereby we see through faith. We turn the gaze of our hearts by faith upon the objects God has declared and delineated for us to look at. The text I read on the Lord's Supper in I Corinthians 11, I believe, directs our heart in five directions.

It is more than appropriate that we have arrived at the Lord's Supper having had a week of festival and rejoicing in our Savior's atoning death for us and His resurrection at Easter. Now the first Sunday after that, we have come to the Lord's Supper which He had established during that week. In that week the Lord had done something pretty extraordinary where He had talked about the three suppers in the life of a believer. When I was a kid I believed in regular meals with three a day. One time we were on a trip to a family home place to Augusta where we arrived late at night and slept late that next morning so when I got up we ate brunch at about 10:30 or 11am but at noon I was back in the kitchen. My mother said "What are doing here?" I said "It's lunch time." She said "We just ate." I said "That was breakfast." "It was 10:30." "That was still breakfast we have to go to the second meal."

There are three meals outlined for you in the Bible that God has provided for His covenant people. The first meal pointed to Jesus and it was called the Passover supper. The last Passover supper Jesus ate with His disciples. Then Jesus put into place the meal we're coming to today which is the first supper of what is the Lord's Supper, that we will eat until He comes again and when He comes again we get to the third meal. That's the marriage supper. That's when we will again eat with Him. This meal we're not eating with Him. We're eating of Him by faith, the body and blood of the Lord being spiritually not physically, communicated with its benefits to His people by faith as we come to the Table. Christ isn't sitting at the table participating with us for we are sitting at the table partaking with Him by faith. Then one day we'll sit at a table with Him which will be at the marriage supper.

Why is this supper here? The Passover supper prepared us for His coming. The Lord's Supper is saying something about His coming but why has this supper been given? Paul doesn't tell us how often to partake of the Lord's Supper but he says to do it often. Why do we here at Briarwood partake in the Lord's Supper

ten times a year? Why do we build the whole service around it when we do it? It is because God has divinely designed it for a special thing. Here is what He has designed it to do. In I Corinthians 15 it said several times we are to come together for the better not for the worse. In other words, His people are sinners saved by grace and they are on the journey of growing in grace and this is one of the means of grace to help us grow. Clearly this isn't for perfect people. Why would He provide something for us to grow and get better in our following of Him if we are perfect? So this is for sinners saved by grace who want to grow in grace.

So how does what God has designed work in our life for the better? The Lord's Supper is the New Covenant meal that replaced the Old Covenant meal of the Passover. The Old Covenant meal was a bloody meal. This one is a bloodless meal. The Old Covenant was pointing to Christ, the Passover Lamb. The New Covenant meal points back to Him but it has the same design and that is to enable God's people to be renewed, recalibrated and to be refocused where they need to be focused in order to grow in the grace and knowledge of their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and to refocus the eyes of their heart there are five directions the text tells you to look.

I have put these five directions in the order of their delivery from the text because the order is very important. So let's take a look at them. When we come to the Table the eye of our heart are to be focused where? Here is the first direction. One we are to look backward. Here is the fruit of the vine. Here is the bread and they are pointing us to the body and blood of Christ. We look backward. Remember the song Onward Christian Soldiers? It's a great song but to get onward you have to go backward. We are not to live in the past but we're to recalibrate, to get refocused.

What is the foundation for the Christian? It is not the church. The church is built on the same foundation that you're built on. Your foundation is not your baptism or your preacher. Your foundation is Christ and Him crucified. It is there that we who are all wrong with God are made right with God by the grace of God through the Son of God who bore our sins in His body and who shed His blood to make us right with God. That's why the Table keeps getting us recalibrated. It is so easy to get our eyes off our foundation in Christ and start thinking that it's on my sincerity or intentions or performance. What you do as a Christian is important but it's not the foundation of your Christian life but it's the fruit of your Christian life. The Lord's Supper is given to us often so that we look backward and remember there is where my sinful soul was justified. It was the Savior who bore my sins in His body and shed His blood.

I was just thinking on this these past few days that isn't it amazing how God has put these elements so appropriately for without the body of Christ I would not be saved for it was in that actual body of Christ that He who knew no sin became sin on my behalf that I might become the righteousness of God in Him. That means

that is absolutely essential, particularly if you were living 2100 years ago. What was the most essential thing that you needed? You had to have bread. You certainly had to have something to drink but you had to have bread for it was the essence of life. The Bread of Life is what it is called. It was life sustenance so God takes bread which is something profoundly important yet amazingly simple.

He uses that to clothe for us spiritually our Savior's body. Not actually now for the glorified body is at the right hand of the Father. He doesn't get re-sacrificed here but spiritually He says 'this is My body, remember Me.' What did I do with that body for you? It is the simple sustaining element of bread. How appropriate was that and when we are about to partake of this Table we will do what Jesus did with it and that is He broke it because that body would go to a cross. In that body He would bear our sins. No bone would be broken but His body would be broken to the humiliation of death. What about the fruit of the vine? It is reminding us of the blood of Jesus as we look to it, feel it, taste it and we're reminded of the crimson flow which is the blood of Christ that was poured out for us. As you drink of the fruit of the vine what is its taste? It is bittersweet and as we look to the flowing of Christ isn't that bitterness when we see that's our sin that He is paying for, but isn't it gloriously sweet for I am forgiven by the shed blood of Jesus Christ, washed clean. Isn't it appropriate that when Jesus sends the cup around to them He pours it out even as He poured Himself out upon the cross for us.

So we look backward to Christ.

Secondly, you look inward. The text says to examine yourself as you come to the Table. Why is step one important? Step one says you are saved by grace through Christ and what He did on the cross now that frees you up from every religion in the world. Every religion in the world tells you what you have to give or do to get to heaven. This one says what you give and do won't get you to heaven. You can give and do because you're going to heaven as a statement of loving obedience but what you're giving and doing won't get you there. In fact our righteousness even as saved sinners, as Christians is as filthy rags. It is still polluted with our sin.

So now when you sin you don't have to cover it up. My granddaddy used to tell me "Son, you're going to sin and when you sin you are going to do one of two things. You're either going to cover or confess." It's just like Adam. When he sinned he went and hid in the trees. He covered up. Then he put some leaves together and tried to fashion them. How do you deal with sin's fear, shame and guilt? Let me cover up in trees. That doesn't work. Let me cover up with leaves. That doesn't work. Let me cover up and blame someone else. It wasn't me it was Eve and You gave me her. Always trying to blame someone else as if it's a gene in your body and you have this outside infection that is causing you to sin. Perhaps if they had more streetlights in my neighborhood I wouldn't have become a thief.

We seem to be always trying to put it on someone else or the circumstances but when you hear the Gospel that frees you up to not have to cover up but 'fess up' as my granddaddy would say. Now we can be honest about our sins because we're not getting to heaven on how well we do. We're getting to heaven on what Jesus did where we look back. Now we're free to go after and assassinate the sin that He paid for on the cross and the first thing you do is confess it. Identify it, confess it and now Lord I want to turn from it to You. So the Lord's Supper is this marvelous opportunity for us to examine ourselves. If we confess our sins He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins. When you confess your sins He'll not only forgive you faithfully, He will forgive you injustice because Jesus paid for that sin and therefore you're forgiven and He will cleanse you from all unrighteousness.

Thirdly, now you're ready to look outward. What about our relationships in the family? Notice that the Lord's Supper is not for private administration. It's not a little pick me up in a small group get together. It is for the gathered assembly of God and Paul said it five times in the text. Paul told this church at Corinth that when they come together it wasn't for the better but for the worse and the reason why is that they were coming together diminishing each other. They were coming to the Lord's Supper and instead of growing in grace and encouraging one another at the Table they were actually using the Lord's Table to humiliate one another. There were worldly divisions. Paul said there are going to be divisions. There will be times when Christians in the church will depart from the truth and those are Kingdom divisions where you hold fast to the truth but at Corinth they were worldly divisions where people had things or some status and they were diminishing others. That is not what we do at the Table. We look outward. Do you have aught against someone? Now forgive them just as Christ forgave you. If someone has aught against you and they come you not only forgive them but you ask them for forgiveness. I'm not talking about today where if you seem to take offense at what I said then that is not asking for forgiveness. "I sinned against you, please forgive me."

We not only recalibrate our relationship focused upon Christ, but we recalibrate our relationships with each other so that the world again would say 'my how they love one another.' We will not have a perfect church but we can bring the effects of the perfect atonement of Christ to bear upon our relationships. Maybe one of the first places to start is not only in the family of God but in your own family – husband and wife, parent and child, child and parent. Lord, make us right with each other because You made us right with You.

Fourthly, we look forward. When we come together to do the Lord's Supper we proclaim His death. The Savior who was born, the Savior who was resurrected, where His resurrection affirmed the sufficiency of His death, His birth brought Him to His death and we come back to His death and proclaim His death until He comes. This supper is only meal two for we have another supper coming. We will get to that supper when He comes again. Every time we do this we're looking to the Eastern sky for He is coming again in glory. We are looking forward.

This is kind of a confession for me. My other life is as a historian for I love history. The historian has to beware not to love history but learn from it and don't live in history. So you don't live in the past but you want to remember to live in the present and you want to move to the future. Christian, listen to this for your history is glorious. Look back there because there Jesus saved you 2100 years ago. Now you can look inward and confess your sins and now you can look outward in your relationships but we need to look forward for your best days are always in front of you. We don't have to live in nostalgia. We live moving to the future with your best days in front of you and your greatest day will be the last day when He comes again on that glorious day. When you look backward to the cross, inward to deal with your sins, outward to deal with your relationships and forward to His coming then that means you're going to live by doing step five.

Step five is you will look upward. You are going to fix your eyes on Jesus. To live this way you have to look upward and focus upon Christ. So that now with the Lord's Supper the eyes of my heart will no longer be captured by the empty promises of this world or by the false idols that are dead in this world or by the latest fad or fascination in this world. My eyes are now on Him. As I look upward behold I see Him. We sang about this in the song *Before the Throne of God Above* that said

'When Satan tempts me to despair,  
And tells me of the guilt within,  
Upward I look, and see Him there  
Who made an end to all my sin.'

God, when I get to this Table please let me see the cross, the body and blood of Christ for I am forgiven because He died. Father, help me to be a sworn assassin against the sin in my life. Help me look inward. Father, help me with humility to forgive and ask for forgiveness as I look outward. Then O God help me look forward. Come quickly Lord Jesus and then help me look upward. See on the throne my great High Priest, for behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father thank You for these moments in Your Word. I thank You for this glorious gift of the Table that points us to the gift of salvation that points us to the gift of Your Son, our Savior. God, I thank You for amazing grace and now Father we come by grace to grow in grace to this Table, looking back where the foundation of our salvation was secured at the cross, the body and blood of Christ, looking in repenting and confessing our sins, looking out that we might love one another, looking forward, come quickly Lord Jesus and looking upward. Lord, help us fix our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith, by amazing grace I pray, Amen.

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