

What to Do During the Lord's Supper - 1 Cor. 11:17-34

Introduction: A small church in upstate New York had a rector in that church for over thirty-five years. After he retired, he was replaced by a young priest. It was his first church; and he wanted to do well. He had been at the church several weeks when he noticed that the people were upset at him.

Eventually he called aside one of the leaders of the church and said, *"I don't know what's wrong, but I have a feeling that there's something wrong."*

The man said, *"Well, Father, that's true. I hate to say it, but it's the way you do the Communion service."*

"What do you mean?"

"Well, it's not so much what you do as what you leave out."

"I don't leave out anything from the Communion service."

"Oh yes, you do. Before our previous rector administered the chalice and wine to the people, he'd always touch the radiator."

"Touch the radiator? I never heard of that liturgical tradition."

So the younger man called the former rector. He said, *"I haven't even been here a month, and I'm already in trouble. It seems you touched the radiator during communion and I don't. Why?"*

"Oh that! Well, you see, before I administered the chalice to the people, I touched the radiator to discharge the static electricity so I wouldn't shock them."

For over 35 years, the people thought that was a part of communion. In fact, it was so widely known that the church became known as *"The Church of the Holy Radiator."*

It can be strange how traditions get started, and even stranger why people endure them for a long time. The Pharisees did that very thing and wound up confusing it and substituting it for practical obedience to God.

The Lord's Supper table is one of those areas where traditions are ingrained. Many churches observe the Lord's Supper only one way - and have repeated it that way for years.

This morning, I want us to think through what is Biblical about the Lord's Supper. We'll look at this from the perspective of *"What should we really be doing when we partake of the Lord's Supper?"*

1. Reconciling (READ 11:17-22)

Paul begins with a scolding because of the way this church observed communion. What were they doing that was so bad?

Well, before we answer that, we need a little background. In New Testament days, it was common for

most churches to combine the Lord's Supper with a dinner. It became known as a "*love-feast*" - a dinner in which the evening meal was shared with other believers.

Now, before you think that sounds strange, remember that it was during an actual evening meal - the Passover meal - that Jesus instituted the first Lord's Supper. So it is not that much of a stretch to see why the early churches were following that pattern.

But the problem for the Corinthian church was not with the love feast itself, rather it with the way they were doing it. It had to do with their attitude. They were a divided church.

Paul spent much of the first three chapters addressing their problem with divisions in the church. This church was divided into little groups or cliques of people who liked to do certain things in certain ways. This had led to grumblings, jealousies, strife, and grudges between the people. The church wasn't unified. And when they came together for communion, they might have been together physically, but not spiritually, and it led to further divisions.

Paul wanted them to understand that Communion is a time of reconciliation with our brothers and sisters in Christ. It's a time to let God to evaluate our relationships, and allow Him to lead us to evaluate them as well.

When our relationships with others in the church aren't right - when we hold grudges - when we are unwilling to forgive - when we talk about others behind their backs - when we refuse to associate with certain groups - we partake of the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner. Division in the body of Christ is sin.

Paul is saying that if we partake of the Lord's Supper without first being reconciled to each other, we are misplacing our priorities. The church is sick and not healthy, and the church will never be what God wants it to be if the people are not willing to be reconciled with our brothers and sisters.

You see, the Lord's Supper is about forgiveness; not revenge and unity; not division. So one of the things we should be doing during communion is reconciling to one another. Another is:

2. Remembering (READ 11:23-25)

Jesus said to do this in remembrance of Him. As we partake of the bread and the cup, we are to remember the sacrifice that was made for us on Calvary.

Jesus sacrificial death should remind us of Rom. 6:23, "*The wages of sin is death.*" If there is sin there must be death. That death was supposed to be our death, but Jesus died for us. He became sin and received the penalty for our sin in our place.

When we sing, "*Nothing but the blood of Jesus*" that's what it means. The only thing that can save us from

hell is believing that the blood Jesus shed for us on Calvary was for us!

When you accept that fact, and start trusting Jesus with your life, the Bible says you will be saved. And when it comes time for you to die, you'll spend eternity in heaven with Him.

So when we take communion, let's not forget the great price that was paid for our sin! Let's remember that nothing but the blood of Jesus has saved us from hell! Remembering is a very important thing to do during communion. Another is:

3. Repeating (READ 11:2)

Jesus said that when we partake of this meal, we proclaim His death until He returns. That means that by every time we take the Lord's Supper, we repeat the story that Christ died for us. And we are to keep on repeating it until He comes again. Why? Because the more we repeat things; the more we remember them. The more we repeat things; the more we believe them. The more we repeat things; the more other people believe them.

So when we come together around the Lord's table, we should be reconciling, remembering, and repeating. But we should also be:

4. Repenting (READ 11:27-32)

Repenting doesn't mean to just feel sorry for sin. It means to ask forgiveness for sin, and to turn away from sinning. And as we're turning away and walking away from that sinful lifestyle, in order for repentance to be complete, we must also walk toward the life of Christ. That's true repentance.

Paul says that before we partake of communion, we should examine ourselves. No real examination can take place without recognizing the holiness of Jesus, and then putting our lives along side His in comparison. His was a sinless life - ours is sinful. He spoke the truth - we speak lies and deceit. He loved unconditionally - we love with strings attached. As we consider how holy He is, it causes us to see how unholy and sinful we are.

In one sense, we can never measure up. We could never be good enough or do enough good deeds to equal His holiness. So, in that sense, we're all unworthy.

However, if we are believers - if we are called Christians, God has bestowed upon us the righteousness of Christ. It's not by our works that we are saved. It's by Christ's finished work. It's because of His righteousness. So in that sense, we can approach His table in a worthy manner - His worth, not ours.

So we should examine ourselves before we partake of communion. And if need be, we need to repent of any unconfessed sin. Finally, there is:

5. Responding (READ 11:33-34)

Responding goes hand-in-hand with repenting. Not only should we repent, we should also commit to make a change in our lives. It's not just a matter of feeling sorry for our sin. It's not just a matter of asking forgiveness for our sin. It's also making the changes necessary to keep it from happening again. We do that by responding to His grace in giving us the opportunity to repent. We do that in prayer - asking God to show us the way of escape from temptation that 1 Cor. 10:13 says He will always provide.

For example if a man repents for cheating on his wife, he should feel sorry for what he did. He should ask forgiveness for it. He should have a desire to be faithful from now on. But he has to get serious about trusting God to help him stop it. He has to stop putting himself in compromising situations where it would be more tempting to do it again. He's got to get serious about believing Jesus, obeying Jesus, and following Jesus instead of Satan.

Repentance calls for a response. How will you respond as a result of our time around the Lord's Table this morning? Is there someone you need to reconcile with? Do you need to repent of an unconfessed sin? Will you responding to God by giving your life to Him or by getting your live back on the right path?