

46-11-01.wpd—Self-Examination Before Communion  
 confession, communion, purity, illness

1 Cor 11:26-32

To approach the Lord's Table properly, we must first probe our hearts.

### **INTRODUCTION:** (text read as Scripture reading)

—God is not concerned with *how we name* the *sacramental meal* Christ instituted (*Holy Communion, the Eucharist, the Lord's Supper*), but our **text** gives *guidelines for its observation*, because **He does care how it's observed**. The context of these guidelines is the wrong way it was being taken at Corinth. Paul gives both a *solemn corrective* and a *warning*: dishonoring the sacredness of Holy Communion puts a believer at risk for divine judgment. This can be avoided, Paul says. **HOM.idea**.

## **I. The Lord's Table Is a Holy Place**

A. The early church ate the *Lord's Supper* at an *agape* [a “love feast”]:

1. As a *community meal*, it manifested unity in the Body of Christ.
2. It was a *potluck* meant for fellowship and sharing [rich=>poor]
3. The *common Table* symbolized Unity— **1 Co. 10:17**, Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.
4. Some were ignoring these love-centered objectives (disrespecting the *brotherhood of rich and poor*...neglecting the holy purpose of the *agape*, taking the Eucharist —**1 Cor 11:17-22**, In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval. When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. 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!)

B. The agape disappeared, but the holiness of Communion remains.

1. Why did the “love feast” disappear? [became separate meal by **300s**]
  - a. Roman persecution [Roman rumors of *sex orgies* and cannibalism];
  - b. Brotherly love grew colder as the church became *popular*—
    - (1) Conversions were often more political than spiritual.
    - (2) House-church intimacy got lost in large temple worship.
2. But the sacredness of Communion was maintained, even with

varying ideas about the relationship of the *elements* (the bread and the cup) to the *body and blood of Christ* they represented:

- a. *transubstantiation* = literal transformation into the real (R.C.)
  - b. *consubstantiation* = elements joined with the real (Lutheran)
  - c. *virtualism* = elements spiritually mixed with the real (Reform.)
  - d. *receptionism* = the real spiritually received in elements (Angl.)
  - e. *symbolism* = the real in symbolism only... (Anabaptist)
3. All these ways of understanding and celebrating the ritual can be very *sacred* and *moving*, but none can boast of practicing the historical NT pattern... (for one thing, the *agape* is missing!).

**TRANS:** Because of the *sanctity* of this divine sacrament, **to approach the Lord's Table properly, we must first probe our hearts.** *Self-examination* is necessary, because there are consequences if we don't.

## **II. Why Is Self-examination So Essential?**

A. Self-scrutiny is expected— **v.28**, *A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.* (How can we do a *self-search*?)

1. **Looking back:** “*Am I joined with the past?*”— **v.23**, For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you... (We maintain continuity...
  - a. by making it a “thanksgiving” [the real **meaning** of *Eucharist*]
  - b. by making it a re-commitment to the New Covenant
  - c. by remembering Christ's work on the Cross (and on the Table!)
2. **Looking forward:** “*Am I ready for His return?*”— **v.26**, *For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*
  - a. Remembering His death reminds us of our own! (By faith we were “crucified with Christ” to live out a new resurrection life.)
  - b. Remembering His return keeps eternal values in view. (We can serve Jesus on earth only for a limited time before we depart.)
3. **Looking within:** “*Am I right with the Lord?*”— **v.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. Taking Communion in “an unworthy manner” is to sin against the Cross (it ignores the purpose of Christ's sacrifice: to keep us from having to stand before God with unprepared hearts.)
  - b. It refuses God's invitation (Confession is urged and pardon is free: no one has to miss this Holy Meal!) [A Scottish preacher said

- to a lady hesitating before the Table: “*Take it, my dear! It's for sinners!*”]
4. **Looking around**: “*Am I recognizing Christ's Body?*”– v.29, *For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. (two meanings, both important)*–
    - a. “*Am I observing **the presence of the Lord** in the Communion?*” (Do I properly *see* and *honor* what’s on this Holy Table—no matter what view I take of it, *literal, spiritual, or symbolic?*)
    - b. “*Am I observing **the presence of the Lord** in the members of the Body of Christ, the Church?*” (**Divisions mend by mutual forgiveness**, but **unity grows by investments** (praying for each other, *encouraging* each other, *serving* each other).
  - B. The *consequences* of failing in self-scrutiny– v.29, *For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself*.
    1. *Rightly* taken, Communion can be a *means of grace* for healing, but *wrongly* taken, it can bring the opposite– v.30. That is why **many** among you are weak and sick, and **a number** of you have fallen asleep.
    2. v.31 says that this kind of judgment is avoidable– But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment.
      - a. What keeps us from self-examination? **Pride?** (having to make humiliating amends); **fear?** (wondering if God will forgive us *again*); **deception?** (making excuses to ourselves for our sins)
      - b. If we do not judge ourselves, the Higher Judge will– v.32. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.
        - (1) His purpose is not to condemn us, but to convict us and save us from *ultimate condemnation*.
        - (2) God took care of our sins at the Cross—He gave us the Communion Table to help us remember it!

### CONCLUSION:

–Communion should be a time of giving thanks, not of worrying about God’s judgment. *Self-examination* before the Table eliminates needless fears, but it does help us have godly fear, holy awe, sacred reverence for this precious and meaningful Meal of the New Covenant.

--Be determined, before taking Communion to make your confession personal during the pastoral prayer. Let the Holy Spirit search your heart in silent prayer. Let's probe our hearts as we approach the Lord's Table, so we can always celebrate it with joy and thanksgiving.

1 Corinthians 11:26-34 ( NIV )

26For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

27Therefore, 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.

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

29For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.

30That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.

31But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment.

32When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.

33So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other.

34If 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.