

Scripture Reading :I Corinthians 11:17-26

“Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you. Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? 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 do not praise you. For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.”

"Being Fed At His Table"

We are spending the final five weeks of ordinary time this year reviewing how we are to rightly worship God by following the pattern that we find in the Scriptures with five elements that have been a part of Christian worship for thousands of years:

- A Call to Worship our Triune God
- A Confession of our sins & forgiveness
- A time of Consecration of the Saints
- A Communion meal with our Savior
- A Commission to disciple the nations

We come this week to the portion of the Covenant Renewal Worship where we eat & drink in the presence of God! This meal with God is a very simple and yet very profound act...

- We must come to see the Lord's Table as the meal which gives meaning to all of the other meals that we share with one another.
- And on the other hand, all of the other meals that we share contribute to our right understanding of what happens at the Lord's Table

If we have gone the way of much of our busy world and forgotten the importance of meals & fellowship, may we repent and remember how important they are to us and any children that God may have put under our care...

They understand that mealtimes are very important

We can all learn some about the mysteries of this Table when we consider some of the basics of food: If the meal we have prepared for the family is just left on the plate or even in the refrigerator it will simply rot...

- And yet when eaten that same food miraculously give us life!
- We should often ponder how dead things give us life!

We must remember, and teach, that family meals or fellowship meals are a time where we see good food & drink encourage and enrich good discussions and relationships with others.

In turn, we learn how good relationships and beautiful tables encourage and enhance the enjoyment of food & drink. This should not surprise us when we consider the prominent place that food has in the Bible: It is EVERYWHERE! You can argue that the entire creation was a banquet table set out before Adam and Eve to enjoy. In the Bible, we see many times where God sits with those He has come to make a covenant with around a meal, like He did with Abraham. We should know well how the covenant families in Egypt gathered for the Passover meal

- That meal was commanded to be held each year as a remembrance of God's great deliverance.

Then we see in the midst of all the Tabernacle and Temple sacrifices, there is a time where the priests and/or the worshippers have a meal before God often with grain and wine... [your homework can be Leviticus 7]

And today we come to the Lord's Table where we have bread and wine, the body and blood of Jesus:

- The wrath of God has been propitiated by the sacrifice of the One True Lamb of God pictured by all those Old Testament sacrifices!

We now gather as those who are in Christ bringing to God a remembrance of what Jesus has done and for us to receive what Jesus called meat & drink indeed.

The Table is not our special time for individual meditation or as an opportunity to draw close to God:

- This is why we sing our confession of faith as we approach the Table, proclaiming who we are in Christ and that we are gathered as His Body.

Coming to this Table is our time to gather and obey the simple commands that Jesus has given:

- Take some bread, give thanks, and eat it.
- Take some wine, give thanks, and drink it.

Fancy communion tables and many translations say, "Do this in remembrance of me"

The better translation is "do this as my memorial" and it is important to remember Who is to remember... This simple Table & our obedience is the memorial, the sign of remembrance but who is to remember? As was the case with the most dramatic sign in the Old Testament, the rainbow, it is God who will remember:

"11 Thus I establish My covenant with you: Never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of the flood; never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth."

- God has made a covenant and then gave a covenant sign to bring it to His remembrance!

12 "And God said: "This is the sign of the covenant which I make between Me and you, and every living creature that is with you, for perpetual generations: 13 I set My rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign of the covenant between Me and the earth... 16 The rainbow shall be in the cloud, and I will look on it to remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that is on the earth."

Yes, when we see a rainbow we should remember that great covenant that God has made and when we partake of communion we should remember what the death of God's Son accomplished...

- BUT we must not forget the stated purpose of the sign:
- In both cases the sign is there to bring the covenant promises to God's remembrance!

Coming to the Lord's Table also reminds us that history is going somewhere:

We have moved beyond the Passover meal where bitter herbs reminded God's people about their bitter slavery, and the blood of the lamb could be seen or remembered on the doorpost.

We have come to a meal of remembrance with good bread and rich wine knowing that Jesus has promised to come again after His Kingdom has filled the earth!

- **In the new creation we find twelve trees bearing fruit each month and the promise of the great marriage supper of the Lamb. *[only element of worship we enjoy in eternity?]***

As we have said, all worship in the Old Testament looked forward to what Jesus would accomplish & all worship in the New Testament celebrates and applies what Jesus has done.

The Lord's Table has been studied and debated for two thousand years, so I am not going to solve all the problems in one sermon, but I hope I can provide a framework to help us understand a proper Biblical balance. As with most important issues there are two cliffs that we need to avoid:

On the one side are those who make too much of the Supper: In a Roman Catholic mass they believe that the priest is actually reenacting the sacrifice of Jesus and that the bread and wine literally become the body and blood of Jesus Who is seated in the heavenlies. If you have been doing your homework in the book of Hebrews you know that the Apostle Paul clearly rejects such errors and rejecting these errors was a major part of the reformation.

Jesus came to save His people from their sins, to be THE sacrifice for sin pictured in the Old Testament and that sacrifice was ONCE for all... We can no longer go back to the animal sacrifices and we cannot try to duplicate what Jesus did on Calvary.

The other cliff is to believe that the Supper is no big deal, just a way to remember what Jesus did like having a family photo album or some home movies to watch as we remember some big events in our lives. Seeing the Supper as merely a way to remember, was the view held and defended by Zwingli and other reformers and is the predominant view in most American churches today.

- **Those who struggled to avoid these two cliffs and stay on solid Biblical ground were men like Martin Luther and John Calvin.**

Both would argue that each cliff was wrong, and both believed strongly in the real presence of Jesus at the Supper and that the Supper should be practiced on a weekly basis.

While I believe Luther and Calvin were very close in their views, sadly those who have followed them have drifted toward the cliffs on either side and today are often far apart.

We would stand with both John Calvin and Luther affirming that Jesus is really present at the Supper and believing, as we have been studying these past few weeks, that the real miracle is knowing that those of us who are in Christ are taken into God's presence through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Here at Church of the King we come to the Lord's Table each and every Lord's Day and we have all baptized members participate, including our baptized covenant children. These are not the common practices in most reformed, charismatic, Baptist or evangelical churches in America today, so we must make the case for doing so. It is also a good place to remember that we must be humble when sharing how and why we worship as we do with people who attend other churches.

- **For example, today I hold that weekly communion is critically important for right worship.**

However, for the first twenty-five years of my walk with the Lord I gave it little thought and attended churches with worship services where the Lord's Table was offered about once a month.

- **I would not have reacted well to someone coming along and telling me boldly how wrong I was at this point, along with all the church leaders that I respected.**
- **Even when we began services here at Church of the King six years ago, I would not have argued for the importance of weekly communion the way that I would today!**

I hope & pray I can now effectively make the case for weekly communion, AND be humble & patient in doing so. I think that Pastor Doug Wilson puts it well, as he often does, when he reminds us that sometimes it takes the Holy Spirit five or ten years to teach us something important...

- **Sadly, we then turn right around and wonder why our next brother or sister in Christ does not get it in fifteen minutes!**

So why weekly communion? There are two primary reasons: First, Jesus tells us to partake as often as we meet, and as we have been studying, this is speaking about when we meet for corporate worship.

- **We do not do communion when-ever we gather for a family meal or a few of us get together for coffee.**

And this relates to the second reason: As we have been studying how God renews His covenant with His people during the worship service we come to see that the Lord's Table is a critical part of what is done.

- **It is here at this Table that we gather to have a meal with our God & Savior as the sign and seal of the covenant between us.**
- **And thus, it should be included each time we come together for worship.**

So, what are the objections to having weekly communion and why is it so rare today in what we would otherwise consider very solid and Biblical churches? Again I think there are two reasons:

The main reason that you will often hear today is that the Supper should be special and doing it every week would make it too common... If we think of it like a photo album or the family movies then yes looking at them every night or even every week could get pretty old.

- **However, if the Supper is a real part of our relationship with Jesus then we should not grow tired of it any more than we do all those family hugs or kissing our wife or husband.**

The other reason is that by the time of the reformation the Lord's Table had been greatly distorted under a lot of pomp and circumstance and many very serious errors had been introduced. Because the Roman Catholic and Orthodox Churches put SUCH a wrong emphasis on the Lord's Supper many reformers were hesitant to restore weekly communion.

So why do we include our baptized covenant children?

- **This is the family meal for the church and this is the reason that we believe that our covenant children are to participate as well. Just as they are expected to be a part of their family meals at home!**

Those who are wearing the wedding garments are invited to the wedding feast, and our children are given those white robes by faith and baptism, not through knowledge and works.

Some will argue that we must exclude our children because they cannot examine themselves as Paul commanded at I Corinthians 11: 28 "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup."

Since these have been wrongly used to exclude our children and those who may not have a full mental capacity from the Table, we must understand what they do mean. Paul is not calling on us to have a private time of examination prior to partaking: This we should have done when we confessed our sins. *If one did not do so, then yes, they should do so before coming to the Table.*

Paul has been addressing the problems of division in the body there at Corinth, as we read in our text and now he shows that it has even impacted how they celebrate communion. Paul's main point is that these divisions are BAD and that NO one in the Body of Christ should be excluded from the Supper...

And we must also consider that if adult warnings are going to be literally applied to our children then they are going to get pretty hungry because in another place Paul tells the church at Thessalonica that if a man will not work, let him not eat!

Next, they will argue that children cannot understand what they are doing, and again they turn to Paul's words in I Corinthians: "29 For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body."

Here Paul is not referring to the bread we are to eat, but to the Body of Christ, the Body that is not to be divided, the point Paul was driving home and he then states why such unity is important...

30 For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. 31 For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged."

While they will argue that Baptism is passive, but we are to participate in the Supper, we believe the Body of Christ should be united in both sacraments.

- It is truly sad that these Scriptures are used today to exclude our children and others from the Table, causing a division of the Body.

Paul's bottom-line is that because they have neglected the body [the gathered Body of Christ not the bread] there are some among them who are suffering and even dying from such neglect.

- It is the opposite of what we saw after Pentecost where the believers had all things in common and took care of all their needs!

Yes, Martha Joy or Mercy cannot explain much about what we are doing during communion or what it means... But who among us can fully explain all that takes place at the Supper? In some ways the little ones practice communion better than we do because they not only want to partake but are the first to look around and enjoy the celebration with all of the Body!

- Thus we do believe that it is very important for us to have our covenant children participate and we do so on a weekly basis.
- We hope and pray that regular partaking by all those who are baptized will once again become a very common practice in the American churches.
- But we must also pray that God would give us the patience to allow our brothers and sisters the time they need to learn the truths we are blessed to practice.
- Again, this is why we sing our creed: Affirming what we believe as a body and having to function as a body to sing it well!

This is why we don't take the bread and wine and bow our heads to quietly eat it by ourselves or even as families:

- We partake together and should rejoice together!

As we partake week after week,

- May we always marvel at what is revealed in its mysteries
- May we grow to understand how truly profound it is in all of its simplicity.
- Knowing, with the child-like faith that Jesus said was required to be a part of His Kingdom, that at this Table our Lord meets us and nourishes us with true meat & drink indeed!
- A memorial for the Father as He looks down and remembers the work of His Son!

Communion Meditation: I Corinthians 10:1

"Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that ALL our fathers were under the cloud, ALL passed through the sea, 2 ALL were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3 ALL ate the same spiritual food, 4 and ALL drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ.