

First Baptist Church, 11-22-15 AM
Sermon: Contending for the Truth About the Lord's Supper
Non Series Sermon
Scripture: 1 Corinthians 11:23-30

What we call the Lord's Supper goes by several different names. In some circles, it is called *Communion*. That Word means a relationship in which something is communicated or shared [Encarta Dictionary]. I have no problem with the word *communion* being used for what we are going to participate in this morning. Other traditions call it a sacrament. Traditionally, Baptists have stayed away from this term because of the meaning it has in the Roman Catholic Church. Catholic doctrine says that what they call the sacraments, including the Lord's Supper, conveys grace to the participants even without faith. In other words, taking communion is a part of gaining one's salvation. Some Protestant groups still use the term *sacrament* but do not teach that it in any way gains salvation for the one participating.

Together, baptism and the Lord's Supper are called the "ordinances" of the church because they were ordained by Christ. As in most Baptist churches, we prefer the use of *Lord's Supper* or *Communion* to refer to this ordinance. In this message, before we participate in the ordinance, I want us to look at some of the prominent errors, both today and in church history, concerning Communion and then see what the Bible actually teaches. The Lord's Supper was instituted by Jesus for His disciples on the night before He was crucified. All four of the Gospels share the giving of this ordinance by Christ. However, the fullest account of the meaning and practice of the Lord's Supper is found in 1 Corinthians 11.

It is heartbreaking, but true, that something so precious as the Lord's Supper is surrounded by so much controversy. The fact is that from the early days of the church, there has been controversy over this church ordinance. That controversy intensified in the days of the Protestant Reformation. Let me give an example of the seriousness of the conflict over this ordinance we call, *The Lord's Supper*. Between the years of 1555 and 1558 during the reign of the Roman Catholic Queen Mary of England (called "bloody Queen Mary"), 288 protestant reformers were burned at the stake. The primary reason for their martyrdom was what they taught about the Lord's Supper.

Let me say a word about controversy within the organized church about doctrine. Controversy is *both necessary and dangerous*.

First, until Christ returns, it will always be necessary to be involved in controversy in matters of doctrine. Because there are tares mixed with the wheat within the organized church we will be called on to contend for the truth. Error does not go away when we ignore it. It grows like a malignant cancer and must be cut out. I can relate to Jude who wrote the short New Testament book bearing his name. Jude 1:3 (NKJV): "Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints." The Greek word translated "contend earnestly" is where we get the word "agonize." False doctrine does not go away on its own. Jude

would have preferred to write concerning our glorious salvation, but he had to write concerning error in the church and then he had to earnestly contend for the faith. Secondly, controversy is dangerous. When contending for the truth replaces our celebrating the truth, we grow cold and joyless and worship becomes tainted or non-existent. This is especially true concerning the Lord's Supper. We are in danger of finding ourselves so engrossed in the true meaning of the Lord's Supper that we neglect the One who gave the Lord's Supper. People who contend at the expense of worship and an intimate walk with the Lord become cold, arrogant, critical, cynical people who do almost as much harm to the church as those who are teaching the error they are contending against!

I remember during the heat of the battle in our denomination, concerning the inerrancy of the Scriptures, rooming with another Pastor at one of the conventions. He said something to the order of, "I don't really understand the issues, but I always vote for the moderate (liberal) candidate for President of the SBC because of the bad attitudes and harsh rhetoric of some of the conservatives." That quote showed his shallowness and ignorance as to the importance of the issue of whether the Scriptures are inerrant, or with error, but it also pictures the danger in contending for the faith with an unloving attitude.

In our day, the primary problem is not the brutality associated with bloody Queen Mary; the real problem today is the superficiality with which we approach the Lord's Supper. Today there is no less error than in previous days, but the attitude is "Whatever you want to believe, it doesn't matter as long as it makes you feel good and as long as you are sincere." It does matter and it is possible to be sincerely wrong!

Our approach in this message is to look first at some of the major errors surrounding the Lord's Supper and confront them with the truth, and then we are going to worship the Lord who instituted the Lord's Supper by participating in the Lord's Supper.

I. Confronting the Errors

The meaning of the Lord's Supper is really very simple and straight forward, but error started creeping in as early as the second century of the church. The errors are centered on the answer to two questions. The first question is, "Was Jesus speaking literally or symbolically when He said that the bread was His body and the wine was His blood?" The second question is, "Is the Lord's Supper a part of the sacrifice of Jesus that has saving merit when taken in, or is it a memorial to assist us to remember what Jesus accomplished and to worship Him?" Let's do some examination using the Scriptures.

A. Literal or Symbolic?

In the early church, we have record from Justin Martyr (~100-165 AD) that the early church had a simple service that included the Bishop or a leader of the church offering a prayer of praise and thanksgiving over the elements (bread and wine) and the people answering, "Amen," and then partaking of the elements. Over time there was a trend to assign a much greater significance to the elements. The prayer of praise and thanksgiving became a prayer of consecration by an ordained priest whereby the bread

magically was at that moment transformed into the literal body of Christ and the wine was turned into the literal blood of Christ.

This view of the Lord's Supper is still the view of the Roman Catholic Church. The official title of this view is "transubstantiation." The definition of that big word is that the substance of the bread and wine are literally transformed into the substance of Jesus' body and blood. The look, taste and smell may remain the same, but the substance is truly transformed. One former altar boy (now a Baptist Theologian) described what happens at the mass.

The high point of the Mass occurred when the priest held up the wafer to God as our sacrifice. We jingled the bells signifying the mysterious transformation that had just taken place in the wafers, the same wafers that had earlier been taken from a large plastic bag in the sacristy. As the people stepped forward to "receive Christ," we held a small copper plate under their mouths lest any of the sacred wafer should fall. As each of these people ate, the priest would say, "The body of Christ," and they would reply, "Amen," meaning "Truly!" Catholic theology taught that they were receiving grace...simply by partaking physically...the people didn't need to understand in order to benefit.

[Tom Nettles and Russell Moore, *Why I Am A Baptist*, page 115]

The key element here is this: Was Jesus speaking literally or figuratively when He said, "This is My body" and "This is My blood"? One hundred percent of the evidence says that He was speaking figuratively. Let me give you several pieces of that evidence.

1. A Symbolic Interpretation is the Most Natural Interpretation

If someone picks up something and says that it is someone's body, the natural way to interpret it is that the thing represents their body. For example, we pull out a picture and say, "This is my grandchild." No one is going to think that you mean, "This paper with colored ink has miraculously turned into my grandchild." If we are watching a movie on the Revolutionary War and in the movie an actor comes into a room and we say, "That's George Washington," we don't mean that this actor born 180 years after George Washington died has been miraculously transformed into the literal George Washington. He is representing George Washington. This is the natural way of taking Jesus' words.

2. Jesus Often Used Symbolic Speech

John 10:9a (NKJV): "I am the door..."

John 15:1 (NKJV): "I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser."

Revelation 1:20 (NKJV): "The mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands which you saw are the seven churches."

Matthew 13:38 (NKJV): "The field is the world, the good seeds are the sons of the kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the wicked *one*." The clearest piece of evidence is that Jesus spoke earlier (not in the context of the Lord's Supper) about eating His body

and blood and clearly told the disciples that He was speaking spiritually or figuratively. Jesus shocked His disciples when He said in John 6:53-56 (NKJV):

Most assuredly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.

Listen to how His disciples responded in John 6:60 (NKJV): “Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard *this*, said, “This is a hard saying; who can understand it?” Jesus spoke to their concerns saying that His words were to be taken spiritually, not literally. He said in John 6:63 (NKJV): “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and *they* are life.” In other words, Jesus is saying that His words have a spiritual application and not a literal one. He alone can satisfy our spiritual hunger and thirst.

3. Every Other Promise of the Presence of Christ with Us in This Age Is Spiritual and Not Literal.

Let me just give you a few examples:

Matthew 18:20 (NKJV): “For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”

Matthew 28:20b (NKJV): “...lo, I am with you always, *even* to the end of the age.”

Revelation 3:20 (NKJV): “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.”

None of those could Jesus be speaking of his literal physical body.

B. A Sacrifice or a Memorial?

An equally dangerous error that is really attached to the first error is the teaching that when we take the Lord’s Supper, Christ is being sacrificed again. In the Roman Catholic Church, the Mass is not just a reenactment of Christ’s sufferings; the official doctrine of the church is that Christ is repeatedly sacrificed. Let me give you a quote from Ludwig Ott’s “Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma” [quoted in Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, page 992]: “The Holy Mass is a true and proper sacrifice.” He also says, “...in every mass Christ also performs an actual immediate sacrificial activity...”

The Catholic Church teaches that this sacrifice in the taking of the Lord’s Supper is a part of the “one single uninterrupted sacrificial act of the transfigured Christ.” [Grudem, page 992]

This interpretation of the Lord’s Supper, actually being a part of Christ’s sacrifice, goes back to the Old Testament sacrifices which were continually offered. This helps explain why Catholicism teaches that salvation is a process that is never finished and no one can know if they are really saved at any point in time. Even if the past is forgiven, what about tomorrow? Each person must continue in the Mass and confessions and the other sacraments. In this errant view, Christ’s sacrifice is never finished. He is offered up repeatedly every time the Lord’s Supper is taken. What a horrible false teaching.

The book of Hebrews clearly teaches that Christ's sacrifice is not like the Old Testament/Covenant sacrifices. They had to continue on and on. The Priest never sat down while sacrificing because the sacrifice was never finished, but Jesus' sacrifice was different! Hebrews 10:10-14 (NKJV):

By that will we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once *for all*. And every priest stands ministering daily and offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins forever, sat down at the right hand of God, from that time waiting till His enemies are made His footstool. For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

If Christ's sacrifice is perpetual, then we have denied that on the cross salvations work was finished. John 19:30 (NKJV): "So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, 'It is finished!' And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit." Do we need to change that to "It is started"? A sacrifice that needs to be repeated is not a perfect sacrifice.

The plain sense of Jesus' words in the Gospels and in 1 Corinthians is that in taking the Lord's Supper, we remember him! It is a memorial that leads us to worship. *The Baptist Faith and Message* (the official doctrinal statement of our denomination) says, "The Lord's Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialize the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His second coming." That is very well and scripturally stated.

II. Embracing the Truth

A. Contemplation (1 Corinthians 11:23-25)

The key word in the Baptist Faith and Message's description of the Lord's Supper is "memorial." That ties in to the word "remembrance" used in verses 24 & 25. This word "remembrance" means more than just recalling it to our mind. It is to relive it. It involves meditation on His sacrifice and the cost and the results. True remembrance always results in worship. The Lord's Supper at its essence is a prompter to a worship experience. If we participate in the Lord's Supper without experiencing genuine worship, we have missed its very purpose. In the Lord's Supper, we see afresh and anew His great love poured out for us. 1 John 4:19 (NKJV) says, "We love Him because He first loved us." In other words, as we focus on his love, the result is an increase in our capacity to love Him. The Lord's Supper involves contemplation that leads to worship.

B. Proclamation (1 Corinthians 11:26a)

Whereas remembering is individual in nature, proclaiming reaches out to others. It is both a testimony to one another and to the world. We preach a sermon in our participation in the Lord's Supper. We cannot help but proclaim the worth of the one we truly worship.

C. Anticipation (1 Corinthians 11:26b)

In taking the Lord's Supper, we not only look back to what He did and look in the present to our victory over sin because we were identified with Him in His death (Romans 6:6), we also look forward to his return as was promised in Acts 1:11b (NKJV): "...This *same* Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven."

D. Examination (1 Corinthians 11:27-31)

What is meant by "an unworthy manner"? The context tells us that it is failing to appreciate what the elements picture – the giving of Christ's body to deal with sin's power and the shedding of his blood to propitiate (satisfy) the wrath of God that sin brings. In other words, it is to treat the Lord's Supper flippantly. It is a failure to exercise genuine repentance over the actions in our life that are inconsistent with who we are in Christ. In summary, it is to treat Christ and His sacrifice and our sin in a manner that says we consider them a minor thing. To trample on or burn our nation's flag is to dishonor our country that the flag represents. To treat with flippancy and disdain the symbol of our Lord's sacrifice and accomplished work is to treat our Lord Himself with disrespect. That is no minor thing. 1 Corinthians 11:30 (ESV): "That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died."

Conclusion

The Lord's Supper is not an optional act with little real significance. It is commanded and to approach it with flippancy or to fail to give it the place it deserves brings God's discipline on His people. Every time we participate in the Lord's Supper we have a unique opportunity to worship the One who paid such a price for us and is coming again to receive us unto Himself.