

# **Challenges Christians Face**

## **Examine Yourself before Partaking**

*1 Corinthians 11:27-34*

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# Examine Yourself before Partaking

## Scripture

We continue our study in *The First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians* in a series I am calling *Challenges Christians Face*.

One of the challenges that Christians face is the issue of proper Christian worship, and for the past two weeks we have been looking at the Lord's Supper as an aspect of Christian worship. Let's learn about more about the Lord's Supper in a message I am calling, "Examine Yourself before Partaking."

Let's read 1 Corinthians 11:27-34:

**<sup>27</sup>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. <sup>28</sup>Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. <sup>29</sup>For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. <sup>30</sup>That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. <sup>31</sup>But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. <sup>32</sup>But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.**

**<sup>33</sup>So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another— <sup>34</sup>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. (1 Corinthians 11:27-34)**

## Introduction

As we begin today's lesson I would like to review briefly some of what I covered last week.

There are two sacraments in the Old Testament of the Bible, and there are two sacraments in the New Testament of the Bible.

The two Old Testament sacraments are circumcision and the

Passover meal. The sacrament of circumcision signified entrance into the covenant community of God's people. And the sacrament of the Passover meal signified fellowship (or communion) within the covenant community of God's people.

The two Old Testament sacraments of circumcision and the Passover meal were replaced by the New Testament sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper. The sacrament of circumcision was replaced by the sacrament of baptism, which also signifies entrance into the covenant community of God's people. And the sacrament of the Passover meal was replaced by the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, which also signifies fellowship (or communion) within the covenant community of God's people.

The apostle Paul established the sacraments of baptism and the Lord's Supper in the church at Corinth when he planted it. Although he did not personally baptize many of the Christians in the Corinthian church (cf. 1:14-16), he affirmed baptism as a non-negotiable act of obedience to the Lord for all believers. The apostle Paul also affirmed the Lord's Supper as a non-negotiable act of obedience to the Lord for all believers.

Unfortunately, however, the practice of celebrating the Lord's Supper in Corinth had degenerated far from the Lord's original intention. The Corinthian Christians gathered regularly to share a special meal. These meals were known as "love feasts" (Jude 12). It was like our modern potluck meal. Everyone brought something to eat and drink to the large home of a wealthy Christian. (Remember that there were no "church buildings" in those days.) The Christians enjoyed a regular meal together, which was then concluded with the Lord's Supper. The purpose of the love feast was to stress fellowship, affection, and mutual caring among the Christians.

Sadly, what Paul had taught the Corinthian Christians about the Lord's Supper was forgotten, and the Lord's Supper was being abused. The Christians who were poor had to work late. Consequently, they were not able to join the rich Christians early enough. Furthermore, the poor Christians did not have much food or drink

at all to bring to the love feast. So, the rich Christians often started the love feast without waiting for the poor Christians. The entire meal then degenerated into a gluttonous, drunken revelry. It was so bad that Paul was compelled to say to the Corinthian Christians, “When you come together, it is not the Lord’s supper that you eat” (11:20).

So, in the section previous to our text for today, Paul reminded the Corinthians that the central focus of the Lord’s Supper was the remembrance and proclamation of Christ’s saving work.

Now, in today’s text, Paul wrote that to mistreat fellow Christians in the Lord’s Supper was to show contempt for Christ’s death, to malign the gospel, and to tempt the judgment of God.

### Lesson

So, in our lesson today, we learn that we are to examine ourselves before partaking the Lord’s Supper.

We learn about this as follows:

1. The Danger of Partaking the Lord’s Supper in an Unworthy Manner (11:27).
2. The Necessity of Self-examination Prior to Partaking the Lord’s Supper (11:28).
3. The Judgment for Partaking the Lord’s Supper in an Unworthy Manner (11:29-32).
4. The Correct Approach to Partaking the Lord’s Supper in a Worthy Manner (11:33-34).

#### **I. The Danger of Partaking the Lord’s Supper in an Unworthy Manner (11:27)**

First, notice the danger of partaking the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner.

Paul said in verse 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.”**

The key word in this verse is the word **“unworthy.”** What does the word mean in this context? Commentator Gordon D. Fee says, “Unfortunately, this adverb [‘unworthy’ in the *ESV*] was translated “unworthily” in the *KJV*. Since that particular English adverb seems more applicable to the person doing the eating than to the manner in which it is being done, this word became a dire threat for generations of English-speaking Christians.”<sup>1</sup>

In other words, there are two general interpretations regarding the word **“unworthy.”**

One interpretation of **“unworthy”** has generally been viewed as partaking while having unconfessed sin. This interpretation understands **“unworthy”** as describing the participant. Fee notes that “this is especially true in the more pietistic sectors of the Protestant tradition. People are ‘unworthy’ if they have any sin in their lives, or have committed sins during the past week. This in turn resulted in reading v. 28 personally and introspectively, so that the purpose of one’s self-examination was to become worthy of the Table, lest one come under judgment. The tragedy of such an interpretation for countless thousands, both in terms of a foreboding of the Table and guilt for perhaps having partaken unworthily, is incalculable.”<sup>2</sup>

To be sure, it is important for Christians to prepare for worship and for participation in the Lord’s Supper. However, Paul’s focus in this verse is much narrower.

Another interpretation of **“unworthy”** has to do with the manner in which one participates in the Lord’s Supper. Here is an instance in which the context is so helpful. Keep in mind that the apostle Paul was correcting the abuse of the Lord’s Supper. And exactly what was the abuse? The rich Christians were not waiting for the poor Christians, and they ate and drank themselves into a gluttonous, drunken revelry. And so commentator Richard Pratt hit the nail on the head when he said, “The unworthiness [Paul] had in

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<sup>1</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 560.

<sup>2</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), note 10 on page 560.

mind was participating in the Lord's Supper in a way that failed to exhibit the unity of the church in Christ."<sup>3</sup> That this was Paul's meaning can be seen quite clearly in his exhortation in verses 33-34, which we shall get to in a moment. To prevent unworthy eating and subsequent judgment, Paul did not advise the Corinthians to confess their sin, or even to recognize Christ's presence in the elements, but to wait for one another and to eat at home prior to coming together to celebrate the Lord's Supper.

The Corinthians' unworthy observance of the Lord's Supper was no small matter. One can imagine them thinking that they had just been inconsiderate of their poor brothers and sisters in Christ. That much was true enough. Yet, Paul insisted that something much worse was happening. Because remembering and proclaiming Christ is the purpose of the Lord's Supper, violators **will actually be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord**. That is to say, their offense violates the central focus of the Lord's Supper: honoring Christ for his work of salvation. To **be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord** is to sin against the very hope of salvation. They were also **guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord** by sinning against Christ's church, or more particularly against the poor Christians who were not granted admission to the Lord's Supper. To sin against those for whom Christ shed his blood and gave his body is to sin against Christ himself.<sup>4</sup>

Well, the danger of partaking the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner is significant. What can be done?

## II. The Necessity of Self-examination Prior to Partaking the Lord's Supper (11:28)

Second, let's look at the necessity of self-examination prior to partaking the Lord's Supper.

Paul said in verse 28: **"Let a person examine himself, then,**

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<sup>3</sup> Richard L. Pratt, Jr., vol. 7, *I & II Corinthians*, Holman New Testament Commentary; Holman Reference (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 202.

<sup>4</sup> Richard L. Pratt, Jr., vol. 7, *I & II Corinthians*, Holman New Testament Commentary; Holman Reference (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 202.

**and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.”**

This verse does not say that the Lord’s Supper should be observed introspectively, with participants focusing mainly on their own hearts. Rather, Paul offered this instruction as a correction to a specific problem. Remember, the rich Christians were eating and drinking without waiting for the poor Christians to join them. They were completely ignoring their unity as brothers and sisters in Christ. In general, then, the Lord’s Supper should be a time of celebration in which Christians focus on Christ’s honor, the church’s unity, and the proclamation of the gospel. The focus should be on others, not on oneself.<sup>5</sup>

Frankly, some of the abuses of the Lord’s Supper do not take place today because of the way we celebrate the Lord’s Supper. Nevertheless, when we do come together we must ask ourselves:

- Would we celebrate the Lord’s Supper with joy if people very different than ourselves were to join us?
- Are there others in the church whom I might be offending?

Self-examination is important, for if we do not examine ourselves, we are in danger of judgment.

### **III. The Judgment for Partaking the Lord’s Supper in an Unworthy Manner (11:29-32)**

Third, let’s look at the judgment for partaking the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner.

The reason for self-examination is clear, as Paul said in verse 29: **“For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.”**

The meaning of **“discerning the body”** is difficult to discern. There are two possible interpretations.

One interpretation for **“discerning the body”** is that **the body** may refer to the church. In this interpretation Paul warned

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<sup>5</sup> Richard L. Pratt, Jr., vol. 7, *I & II Corinthians*, Holman New Testament Commentary; Holman Reference (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 202.

participants to treat their fellow members in the body of Christ with proper regard while participating in the Lord's Supper. This interpretation agrees with Paul's instructions that the Corinthians should treat one another well in the Lord's Supper to avoid God's judgment.

Another interpretation for "**discerning the body**" is that **the body** may be an abbreviation for "the body and blood." Paul had just referred to the body and blood of Jesus in verses 24-27, and so in this interpretation Paul was warning participants to give proper consideration to the preciousness of Christ's body and blood—the focal points of the Lord's Supper. By implication he also would have meant that partakers should recognize and honor the church for whom Christ gave his body and shed his blood.

In either case, Paul pointed once again to the seriousness of violating the Lord's Supper. Those who did so would not escape God's judgment.

Paul continued explaining the seriousness of violating the Lord's Supper by pointing out the judgment the Corinthians were experiencing as a result of their failure to observe the Lord's Supper properly. He said in verse 30a: "**That is why many of you are weak and ill.**" Paul probably received information about illnesses in the church from messengers sent to him.

Furthermore, Paul noted in verse 30b: "**. . . and some have died.**" Some in the church had actually died as a result of God's judgment against them because of their sin against the body of Christ.

Now, it is important to note that sickness and death do not always happen as a result of personal sin. They come to believers and unbelievers alike for many reasons. For example, God allowed Satan to afflict Job in order to test him (Job 2:1-7). God allowed a man to be born blind so that the works of God might be displayed in him (John 9:2-3). But in this situation, Paul had apostolic authority to support his pronouncement.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Richard L. Pratt, Jr., vol. 7, *I & II Corinthians*, Holman New Testament Commentary; Holman Reference (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 203.



Paul added the comment that if the Corinthians **judged** themselves **truly**, they **would not be judged** (11:31). In other words, if the Corinthians took time to evaluate themselves before the Lord's Supper and changed their actions based on this evaluation, God would not judge them with sickness and death.

God disciplines his church so the true believers will take notice and turn back to Christ in repentance, **so that they will not be condemned along with the world** (11:32).<sup>7</sup>

So, God's judgment for partaking the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner is real. What then is the correct approach to the Lord's Supper?

#### **IV. The Correct Approach to Partaking the Lord's Supper in a Worthy Manner (11:33-34)**

Finally, let's look at the correct approach to partaking the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner.

Paul closed this section with a general summary, giving some final instructions. He appealed to the Corinthian Christians as **brothers**. Paul wanted them to turn from this serious sin of abusing the Lord's Supper. And so, in order to avoid God's judgment, he said that they needed to do two things in order to partake of the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner.

##### *A. The Right Attitude (11:33)*

First, the right attitude is needed in order to partake of the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner.

Paul said in verse 33: **“So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.”**

Paul was of course referring to the way in which the rich Christians did not wait for the poor Christians at their love feasts. He was teaching them that they were to wait for all the Christians

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<sup>7</sup> Richard L. Pratt, Jr., vol. 7, *I & II Corinthians*, Holman New Testament Commentary; Holman Reference (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 203.

to arrive before beginning the meal. The purpose of the love feast, which included the celebration of the Lord's Supper, was to stress fellowship, affection, and mutual caring among the Christians. But the way it was presently being carried on was accomplishing exactly the opposite.

The correct approach to partaking the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner begins with the right attitude. It requires due preparation of heart. But, more importantly, it demands that the entire covenant community visibly demonstrate its love for Christ and for one another. It is striking that Paul does not say, "So then, my brothers, when you come together to sit at the Lord's Table. . . ." The problem was not simply that they abused the Lord's Supper and needed to brush up on their etiquette for that particular occasion. Attitude comes before etiquette. Their problem was comprehensive and spiritual. They needed to repent of their rotten attitudes toward one another so that their observance of the Lord's Supper was indeed a visible demonstration of their fellowship and love for Christ *and* for one another.

*B. The Right Action (11:34)*

And second, the right action is needed in order to partake of the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner.

Paul said in verse 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 original love feast included a regular meal as well as the Lord's Supper. As I mentioned earlier, the poor Christians arrived late, and so the rich Christians started the meal prior to the arrival of the poor Christians. Paul's remedy was simple: **eat at home** so that you won't be hungry when you come to the meal.

In our day, we rarely combine the Lord's Supper with a love feast or some other kind of meal. Therefore, we are less likely to abuse the Lord's Supper in this way.

## Conclusion

The Corinthian Christians had abused the Lord's Supper to the point that Paul no longer considered it a celebration of the Lord's Supper. To correct this problem, Paul applied three principles to the problem of abuse of the Lord's Supper in worship. These are principles we are to follow as well.

*First, we must honor God in our worship.* All of our worship must conform to Scripture. As a Reformed Church, we practice what we call the Regulative Principle of Worship, which simply means that all of our worship is regulated by Scripture. So, we must constantly check our attitudes and our actions by Scripture to see if we are faithful to what God is calling us to do in worshiping him.

*Second, we must demonstrate love for our fellow believers in our worship.* The problem in the Corinthian Church is evident when we understand what took place. There was a careless disregard for fellow believers. We must not let that take place in our community. We must work hard at loving one another. That means serving them and putting their interests ahead of our own.

*And third, we must give a clear testimony to the world in our worship.* The Early Church had a remarkable testimony of love for one another. Frankly, it stunned the culture around them. Let us so love and care for one another that the people of New Tampa will be stunned by our love for another. Then the Lord's Supper will truly be a visible demonstration to the world of our unity in Christ and with one another. Amen.



# Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ  
and **membership** in his church family,  
develop them to Christlike **maturity**,  
equip them for their **ministry** in the church  
and life **mission** in the world,  
in order to **magnify** God's name.*

## Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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1. [www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons](http://www.tampabaypresbyterian.org/Sermons)
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**PRAYER:**

Lord Jesus, we celebrate the Lord's Supper regularly. We thank you for the apostle Paul's instruction in how we are to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Help us to approach the Lord's Supper correctly so that we do not fall under your judgment, but instead demonstrate to the world the unity we have in Christ and with one another.

And for this I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

**BENEDICTION:**

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and always. Amen.

**CHARGE:**

Now, brothers and sisters, go and serve the only true God who is faithful.