

Please turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 11. This morning we come to the final sermon in this series pertaining to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. While there is much more that could be said concerning this sacrament, and we could go into much greater depth than what we have, but that is not the point of this series. The point of this series is not to be exhaustive, but to provide the Biblical basis for why we worship the way that we do. Lord willing, these sermons have stirred in you the desire to study more in depth on these doctrines and practices. I pray the sermons so far have been a blessing to you, and I pray this one will be as well. Give now your attention to the reading of God's Holy Word from 1 Corinthians chapter 11 beginning at verse 23.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:23

Pray

Last Lord's Day we considered how it is that the Lord Jesus Christ is present in the Supper. That there is a real spiritual presence of our Lord, and that when we partake of the elements of bread and wine by faith we do really partake of the body and blood of Christ. This doctrine of the real presence of Christ in the Supper, this understanding that we are truly communing with our risen Savior when we come to partake of this meal, is incredibly important for understanding how it is we are to approach the Table. If you are sitting at the King's Table and feasting alongside Him in this Supper, then there is a preparation that must be done beforehand. In Amos 4:12 we read, "Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel." There is a call to prepare yourself prior to meeting your God. And so each Sabbath there ought to be a preparation that is done prior to coming into the presence of the Lord. If you recall in the Old Testament the day before the Sabbath was called the day of preparation. This was because it was understood that affairs had to be in order and that your heart had to be prepared to meet with your God. And so there is a need weekly to prepare yourself prior to the Sabbath. And then each Lord's Day

prior to the service beginning there is another moment in which we ready our hearts to enter into the Lord's presence. But the point of this sermon is not the preparation that is necessary before coming into the presence of the Lord each Sabbath, but instead the special preparation that is necessary prior to coming to the Lord's Table. There is a particular emphasis that the Scriptures place upon the preparation of the communicant prior to partaking of the Lord's Supper that is not placed upon any other part of worship. So this morning we will take up the duty of preparation prior to the Lord's Supper by considering four headings: first, the need for preparation; next, what is partaking unworthily; third, the consequences of partaking unworthily; and finally, some practical helps in preparation.

Let us first consider the need for preparation. In verse 28 we see the basis for this in our text, "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup." This testifies to the fact that there is a special preparation which must be done before coming to the Table. And when we consider that the Lord's Supper has its roots in the Old Covenant sacrament of Passover, we get an even clearer picture of what this means. In 1 Corinthians 5:7 we read, "Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us." This preparation which is necessary is the purging out the old leaven so that you may come to the Lord as one who is not tainted by the leaven. This is part of the preparation that was required of the Old Covenant saints during the feast of unleavened bread prior to the Passover. We see in Numbers 28:16-25 that the preparation for that sacrament was one of diligent religious action, "And in the fourteenth day of the first month is the passover of the Lord. And in the fifteenth day of this month is the feast: seven days shall unleavened bread be eaten. In the first day shall be an holy convocation; ye shall do no manner of servile work therein: But ye shall offer a sacrifice made by fire for a burnt offering unto the Lord; two young bullocks, and one ram, and seven lambs of the first year: they shall be unto you without blemish: And their meat

offering shall be of flour mingled with oil: three tenth deals shall ye offer for a bullock, and two tenth deals for a ram; A several tenth deal shalt thou offer for every lamb, throughout the seven lambs: And one goat for a sin offering, to make an atonement for you. Ye shall offer these beside the burnt offering in the morning, which is for a continual burnt offering. After this manner ye shall offer daily, throughout the seven days, the meat of the sacrifice made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the Lord: it shall be offered beside the continual burnt offering, and his drink offering. And on the seventh day ye shall have an holy convocation; ye shall do no servile work.”

Elsewhere, in Deuteronomy 16:4, the Lord commands the removal of all leaven from the household seven days prior to the feast day. While the exact prescriptions of these preparatory actions have pass away with the abrogation of the ceremonial laws through the atoning work of Christ’s sacrificial death, the principle remains that prior to coming to the feast set before the people of God in the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper, those who are to commune at the Table must prepare themselves diligently through religious action. Following the pattern laid forth in this text, it is a good and godly practice that the preparation to come to the Table be conducted by a week of religious action preceding partaking of the sacrament. That is why we here observe communion seasons in order to provide the appointed times of focused self examination and preparation, to give ample opportunity to search out the hidden places of your hearts and truly repent of your sins. To not do so would be to approach the Lord of glory, the Holy One of Israel, while still marred by the unrepentant sin that remains within you. We know that sin cannot dwell in the presence of the Almighty. And so just as a musician first puts his instrument in tune before he plays, your heart must first be prepared, and put in tune, before it goes to meet with God in this solemn ordinance of the sacrament. Thomas Watson poignantly says, “He that comes unpreparedly to the Lord’s Supper turns the cup in the sacrament into ‘a cup of fury’; ‘He changes the cup of blood into the cup of wrath.’” Friends, the Scripture is clear; there is a need for preparation in coming to the Table.

And to not do so puts you at risk of partaking unworthily. We see this in verse 27, “Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.” So what does it mean to partake unworthily? Some restrict it to the Corinthians, and the abuse that had crept in among them, but I am of opinion that Paul here, according to his usual manner, passed on from the particular case to a general statement, or from one instance to an entire class. There was one fault that prevailed among the Corinthians. He takes occasion from this to speak of every kind of faulty administration or reception of the Supper. “God,” says he, “will not allow this sacrament to be profaned without punishing it severely.” Matthew Henry writes, “They shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord (Rom. 11:27), of violating this sacred institution, of despising his body and blood. They act as if they counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith they are sanctified, an unholy thing, Heb. 10:29. They profane the institution, and in a manner crucify their Saviour over again. Instead of being cleansed by his blood, they are guilty of his blood.” So partaking unworthily is not merely making a carnal feast out of the Supper and indulging yourself to the neglect of others as the Corinthians were doing. It is to partake of the Supper in any way that is contrary to how it was instituted or what the Lord commands in how it is to be done.

That would include the error of the Corinthians, but it would also include those who partake by means not authorized by Christ. There are some who practice intinction, which some of you here may have never even heard of. It’s when you dip the bread into the wine and partake in that way. But this is contrary to what the Lord commanded when He instituted the Supper. The command is to take and eat, then to take and drink. They are two separate actions which cannot rightly be combined into one. And this is just one example. We don’t have time to go into the many different ways in which people partake of the Supper in an unauthorized manner, thus partaking unworthily. Partaking unworthily would also include

partaking as one who has neglected the command for self-examination in preparation for the Supper. Exodus 12:15 makes it clear that there is a grave punishment for those who do not prepare themselves for the sacrament, “Seven days shall ye eat unleavened bread; even the first day ye shall put away leaven out of your houses: for whosoever eateth leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that soul shall be cut off from Israel.” Partaking unworthily also has expression in those who partake of the sacrament as though they are in Christ but in reality they are hypocrites. While this is not specifically what Paul is talking of here in our text, since he is addressing those believers within the church at Corinth, it is an aspect of partaking unworthily.

So we see there are different types or degrees of partaking unworthily, some more grievous than others. Calvin observes, “Some fornicator, perhaps, or perjurer, or drunkard, or cheat, (1 Cor. 5:11) intrudes himself without repentance. As such downright contempt is a token of wanton insult against Christ, there can be no doubt that such a person, whoever he is, receives the Supper to his own destruction. Another, perhaps, will come forward, who is not addicted to any open or flagrant vice, but at the same time not so prepared in heart as became him. As this carelessness or negligence is a sign of irreverence, it is also deserving of punishment from God. As, then, there are various degrees of unworthy participation, so the Lord punishes some more slightly; on others he inflicts severer punishment.”

So clearly there are consequences for partaking unworthily. We saw that in the Old Covenant the consequence for not preparing for the feast was to be cut off from the people. What is the consequence in this New Covenant age? We see it very plainly in verses 27-30, “Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not

discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.” Those who eat and drink unworthily are guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. Friends, I want to highlight how heinous a thing this is, to be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. To partake in an unworthy manner is to take upon yourself the bloodguilt of crucifying the Lord of Glory. Friends, that is a terrible thing. And so the Lord does not let such a heinous action go unpunished. We read, “For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.” This word damnation does not mean eternal damnation, but instead it is a temporal judgement that is spoken of. Henry states, “Those were in the favour of God who yet so highly offended him in this instance, and brought down judgments on themselves; at least many of them were; for they were punished by him out of fatherly good-will, punished now that they might not perish for ever.”

I want us to take a few moments and camp out here on this point. Paul says, “For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.” Part of partaking of the Lord’s Supper in a worthy manner is to discern the Lord’s body. It is to understand what is meant by the words, “Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me... this cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.” If you are not meditating upon the work of the Lord Jesus Christ in purchasing your salvation, then you are not discerning the Lord’s body. You are treating these elements of bread and wine as though they are nothing more than the food on your own dinner table. This is so incredibly important when it comes to the Lord’s Supper and how we are to partake in a worthy manner. It’s also important in understanding who it is that is permitted to partake of the Supper. If one of the requirements is to discern the Lord’s body, and that is combined with the need for self-examination, then it is absurd to permit infants and children to partake of the Lord’s Supper. Paedo-communion is such an evil and wicked practice, a doctrine of devils,

because these parents and the elders of those churches are force-feeding damnation to be heaped upon their children. What sheer wickedness this is. And so we confess in Larger Catechism 173, “Such as are found to be ignorant or scandalous, notwithstanding their profession of the faith, and desire to come to the Lord’s Supper, may and ought to be kept from that Sacrament, by the power which Christ hath left in his Church, until they receive instruction, and manifest their reformation.” I don’t want to push this point any further; it was just necessary that we publicly renounce such an evil practice that is creeping into Reformed churches.

And note that from this judgement, this damnation, which is meted out upon those who partake unworthily there are real physical effects. “For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.” The Lord causes actual weakness to overtake people’s bodies. He causes actual diseases to overcome them as an act of divine judgement upon them for their partaking unworthily. And there are those who sleep, those who have died as judgement for this sin. Friends, these are real consequences, real punishments, real judgements that are the result of coming to the Table and partaking of the Supper unworthily. If you ever find yourself weak or sickly following the sacrament of communion the first thing you ought to do is begin the process of self-examination and confession of sin. This judgement is intended to bring the wayward sinner back unto Christ through true repentance. But continued neglect in this will not be tolerated. The Lord will cause it to cease one way or another. And I can assure you folks, Jehovah still deals with His church in this way. He may think that we’ve figured these things out and that it’s just the spread of germs, but friends do not think for a second that the Lord does not continue to strike those who partake unworthily with weakness, sickness, and even death. If we would thoroughly search and explore ourselves, and condemn and correct what we find amiss, we should prevent divine judgments. This goes for individuals, congregations, and denominations alike. The sacrament is not an individual ordinance but a corporate one. Those

who are guilty corporately of partaking unworthily will face the judgement of the Lord corporately. This is likely why so many churches and even denominations as a whole are weak and sickly and some even sleep. Friends, there are consequences for partaking of the Supper of our Lord unworthily.

I know all of this is a lot. It can feel overwhelming. It can feel heavy. So I want us to close by considering some practical helps for your own preparation for the Lord's Supper. First and foremost examine yourself. Search out the secret places of your heart to find any unrepentant sin. Ask the Lord to search out your heart, for He will show you the secret sins which you have overlooked. Larger Catechism 171 is incredibly helpful for self-examination and preparation, "They that receive the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, are, before they come, to prepare themselves thereunto, by examining themselves of their being in Christ; of their sins and wants; of the truth and measure of their knowledge, faith, repentance, love to God and the brethren, charity to all men, forgiving those that have done them wrong; of their desires after Christ, and of their new obedience; and by renewing the exercise of these graces, by serious meditation, and fervent prayer." Are you in Christ? Have you made Him your own? Have you made His covenant your own? What are you lacking in regards to fulfilling your covenantal obligations to Christ? Do you understand what it means to partake of the body and blood of Christ? Are you resting upon your own righteousness to make you worthy to partake of the Supper, or are you resting in Christ, who alone is worthy, to bring you to His Table? Do you love the brethren? Do you have any unreconciled conflict with a brother or sister that needs to be addressed? These are all things you ought to ask yourself each time prior to coming to the Lord's Table. And during that week of preparation see to it that those things which need to be addressed or corrected are.

Spend time during the week of preparation in time of serious meditation and prayer. The work of self-examination is an arduous

task which takes a great amount of focus and determination. It's not something you can just wait until the Saturday before to do and then expect to be found coming to the Table of the Lord's Day. Meditate upon the Word of God. Let it dwell in you richly. Allow the Word to show you where you have fallen short and where you need to strive all the more. Let it show you the Savior who is there, who bore your sins and transgressions upon His shoulders. Spend time with your heavenly Father in fervent prayer. Pray that the Spirit would work in your heart what is necessary to rightly prepare you to come and sit at the King's Table. Some of you may find having something to read be an aid in this meditation and fervent prayer. *Feasting with Christ* by Joel Beeke, *Meditations on the Lord's Supper* by Jacob Janeway, and *The Communicant's Companion* by Matthew Henry are all great resources that I use to aid in this preparation for the Supper. Also let Larger Catechism 171 and Shorter Catechism 90 be helps in your preparation. Turn off the tv or radio or whatever other form of entertainment you tend to enjoy, turn it off during that week of preparation and instead listen to sermons which applied the truths of God to your heart. These things will all be incredibly helpful in your preparation for the Supper.

And if you're sitting there thinking to yourself that this is all too much. We can never do all of this stuff in the way that we ought to. You're right, we can't. But that doesn't mean that we shouldn't put forth the effort to do what we can. Don't let these things overwhelm you to cause you to doubt or become weak in the faith. And if you are hurting or struggling recognize that Christ is the one who will not break a bruised reed nor quench the smoking flax. Come unto Christ even in your weakness and struggles, and find refuge there in the arms of your Savior. Hear the comforting words of Larger Catechism 172, "One who doubteth of his being in Christ, or of his due preparation to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, may have true interest in Christ, though he be not yet assured thereof; and in God's account hath it, if he be duly affected with the apprehension of the want of it, and unfeignedly desires to be found in Christ, and to depart from iniquity: in which case (because

promises are made, and this Sacrament is appointed, for the relief even of weak and doubting Christians) he is to bewail his unbelief, and labor to have his doubts resolved; and, so doing, he may and ought to come to the Lord's Supper, that he may be further strengthened." The purpose of self-examination is not to discourage us and frighten us away from the Lord's table, but that we may approach the Lord's table aright and receive a blessing.

Brothers and sisters, this preparation before coming to the Lord's Table is not optional, it is a requirement. Yes, we ought to prepare ourselves each Lord's Day before coming into the presence of Jehovah, but there is a special preparation which must be done before coming to the Table. No where in Scripture is there a warning of damnation given to those who pray in an unworthy manner, or sing in an unworthy manner, or sit under the preaching of the Word in an unworthy manner, or even come to the sacrament of baptism in an unworthy manner. And so we must understand the particular nature of this command of the Lord to prepare ourselves, examining ourselves, prior to coming to partaking of the Lord's Supper, lest we eat and drink unworthily. Let us be diligent in this, always looking to Christ as the one who truly prepares us to sit at His Table.