“Union And Communion”

November 4, 2018

I Corinthians 11:17-34

Please find with me the eleventh chapter of the Book of I Corinthians.

Her name is Molly Smith. Molly appears quite happy when she arrives at Church. But she and her former friend Joan won’t even speak to one another. Molly is quite sure that Joan said something about her and now she’s also very upset and she will not speak to her.

On the other side of the Church is Rob. Rob is *very* active in the Church. He teaches the middle school boys Sunday School class. But he does also everything around the property. Whenever there’s a task on the Church grounds that needs attention, Rob is the go-to- guy. The Pastor calls him “Faithful Rob.” But beneath the exterior of lots of service, Rob is still carrying a load of guilt from something he did ten years ago. So, in essence, he might just be trying to work off his guilt. He hasn’t even told his wife what he did. He finds it easier if he just does a lot of service for people.

Then there’s Charlie. Charlie has a personal battle. He’s addicted to pornography and has yet to find a way to overcome it. [Taken from an illustration from a sermon by Pastor Steven J. Cole from <https://bible.org> “How To Come To The LORD’s Supper” June 25, 2017].

Folks, these are four fictional people. Yet, they represent a Church that really did exist. It was the Church at Corinth and it existed in the first century A.D. At Corinth the people were as ordinary as you and me and also with as many struggles as we face in America in 2018.

And one more thing. They didn’t have a Church building. Instead, they met in a more “well to do” person’s home. “Their worship time was preceded by a pot-luck supper called the Agape, or Love Feast (Jude 12). The problem in Corinth was that the wealthy members got there first with their sumptuous dinners and gorged themselves. When the slaves and other poor people arrived, the food was gone. Even worse, a few of the wealthy filled their

wine glasses a bit too often, so that they were getting drunk. As a result, they completely missed the significance and purpose of the Lord’s Supper. Some of the members were suffering severe discipline from the Lord for their irreverence.” [Pastor Steven J. Cole – see above reference].

Now, that’s something like the background for this eleventh chapter of I Corinthians. Please follow in your Bible at the seventeenth verse. I Corinthians 1:17 *“Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse. (18) For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it.*

*(19) For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you. (20) When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's Supper. (21) For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken.*

*(22) What? Have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? Or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I praise you not. (23) For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread:*

*(24) And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. (25) After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, this cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.*

*(26) For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. (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. (28) But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.*

*(29) For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. (30) For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. (31) For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.*

*(32) But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. (33) Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another. (34)* *And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come.”*

I’ve titled today’s message “Union And Communion.” Shall we pray?

The Bible is the only book in the world that God wrote. So, whatever subject you read about in the Bible, you can be sure that it will present the truth. And the background to our present-day observation of the Lord’s Table includes, not only Jesus and His Apostles at the Last Supper, but this word from the Apostle Paul about what was happening in one of the New Testament Churches. And what was happening was not pretty, to say the least.

But I’d like to ask the question why? Why were some people abusing the Communion Table? And why was Paul so seemingly harsh when he judged these people? Well, the reason is this. The table is a table of communion; in particular, it’s communion with God and communion with their brothers and sisters in Christ. And they were missing out on having communion with the LORD and, because they weren’t walking with the LORD, they had become extreme in their selfishness and had, in essence, compromised their communion with each other.

So, today’s topic is communion. And today we will come to the Communion Table.

What does communion mean to the Christian? And why should every Christian make sure they attend the Communion Service at the Church?

First, union with Christ precedes communion, verse twenty-six. I Corinthians 11:26 “*For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.”*

When Jesus met with Apostles at the Last Supper, He did two things. One, He established the LORD’s Table as a unique Christian meal. And two, He told the men that He is the focus, the center, even the purpose for the meal.

So, anyone who comes to the table of the LORD and eats of the bread and the fruit of the vine must be a Believer in the LORD’s death. And all those who believe on Christ as the One Who died for their sins has entered into Eternal Union with Christ.

We show His death until He comes again. The power of the table is found in one thing; Christ’s death. And what has happened to everyone who is resting in Christ’s death? We’ve been made alive in Him because Jesus did not and could not stay dead. Today we are in union with the very same Person Who died and rose again. We are one with Him.

First, union with Christ precedes communion with Christ.

Second, the Communion Table is a table of remem-brance; verse twenty-three. I Corinthians 11:23 *“For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, that the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: (24) And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you:* ***this do in remembrance of me****.*

*(25) After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, this cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it,* ***in remembrance of me****.”*

These words that Paul uses here come right off the pages of the Gospels. Luke 22:19 *“And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, this is my body which is given for you:* ***this do in remembrance of me****.”*

A young man wanted, from his boyhood, to become a soldier and fight for our country. He often spoke about it to his brothers and sisters and especially to Mom and Dad. Then, when he graduated from high school, this young man did exactly what he said he would. He joined the Marines. He worked very hard and attained the level of an E-8, a Master Sergeant in the U.S. Marines. He then deployed to Afghan-istan in 2011. Then re-deployed two more times. On his third deployment in 2013 this young marine lost his life to an IED. And what have his parents done for the past five years at Thanksgiving? They arrange one place setting and a chair at their table. Why? In remembrance of their son. They show their continuing love and respect and they remember him.

There are very few things in life as wonderful as this. When you do something solely as a reminder of someone, you hold that person in high esteem. And, when you neglect the LORD’s Table or when you come in a selfish spirit to the Table of the LORD, you are, in essence, saying that you don’t hold the LORD or His death in very high regard.

But, when you do attend the Table of the LORD, you come because Jesus is the Most Important Person in your life; not only in history, but in your own life, as well.

And, according to this passage, those who had eaten all the food and had gotten drunk at the Agape Feast in the city of Corinth weren’t just acting selfishly, they were showing that they had lost their first Love; that Love being Jesus Christ. They were not coming out of respect. And they did not remember the LORD at His own table.

Now think carefully about how this applies to today. Coming to the table signifies this. It indicates to you and those who join you at the table that you have placed your entire future into the hands of Someone’s death. You show the LORD’s death until He returns; verse twenty-six. I Corinthians 11:26 “*For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.”*

We come to the table because we remember Who Christ is and what He did for us. He died. God became a man so that He might die. And in His death, He paid the penalty you deserve for the sins you committed against Him. To come to this table is to show your respect to the One Who loves you, Who sacrificed Himself for you, and Who rose again for your justification. We come because we remember the One Who gave His life for us.

First, union with Christ precedes communion with Christ.

Second, the Communion Table is a table of remembrance.

Then, third, is the LORD’s Table really that important?

Folks, how serious is the LORD regarding the Communion Table? Here’s what He says. When we disrespect *His* Table, we can expect to be Him to chasten us; verse twenty-nine. I Corinthians 11:29 “*For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh* ***damnation [judgment]*** *to himself, not* ***discerning*** *the Lord's body. (30) For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. (31) For if we would* ***judge*** *ourselves, we should not be* ***judged****. (32) But when we are* ***judged****, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.”*

Chastening means “child-training.” And Christians are the children of a Heavenly Father. And chastening, as every parent knows, is a very valuable tool for family life. How else can you be trained to love and respect your parents? How else could you develop a close relationship to your parents? How else can a child realize his potential as he or she grows into adulthood?

You see, if a parent doesn’t love his son or daughter, he or she will not chasten them. So, when the LORD chastens you, it’s always good and it’s always for good reason. And it’s always founded upon His love, His personal love for you. And it’s always a clear rebuke of some attitude or behavior you are committing.

Hebrews 12:5 *“…ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him: (6) for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.*

*(7) If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? … (11) Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.”*

You see, there is a tremendous benefit to the chastening hand of the LORD.

Now, according to Paul here in I Corinthians, what’s the reason for God applying His chastening rod to the Church in *this* passage? It’s because the Christians had disrespected the LORD’s Table, the Communion Table.

There are two words here that show what these Chris-tians were really doing and which show exactly why chastening was necessary. The words are “damnation” and “discerning.” Damnation is the Old English term for judgment; in particular, a judgment that carries serious results. Whenever someone comes to the table and eats and drinks unworthily, God must pass judgment on them; no, not the eternal judgment of Hell, but the judgments of weakness, sickness, and even death. I Corinthians 11:30 *“For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.”*

The LORD must judge His own. And why, says Paul? It’s because some do not discern, meaning, they do not properly judge the LORD’s body. Some think the LORD’s broken body isn’t worth their time and effort to attend the Com-munion. And some come to the Table selfishly with a focus on themselves and not on the LORD. And some come just because others come.

The result; verse thirty again. I Corinthians 11:30*“For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. (31) For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. (32) But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.”*

Any Church or any Christian who neglects the LORD’s Table will be chastened in one of three ways; with weakness, or with sickness, or with death. And the term “sleep” here is a reference to death.

And, fortunately for us, we are chastened by the LORD for the disrespect we’ve shown to His table. Why? Because all those who are chastened by the LORD *are not and cannot* be condemned along with the world. We stand on a much higher level. We’re *His*. And, since we are *His* children, and whenever we’ve disrespected *His* Table, we must expect and we must endure *His* discipline, God’s child-training.

Showing disrespect to the LORD’s Table is certainly much, more serious than we often think. So, yes, the Table of the LORD really is that important.

And, one more thing, Paul uses the word “discern” as the reason for the chastening. What is it that we do wrong when we don’t “discern” the LORD’s body?

Here it is. There are only two elements to be eaten at the table, the bread and the fruit of the vine. And both elements remind us of one Person and one event in history, the LORD’s crucifixion. On the day that Jesus Christ shed His blood, He addressed the sin problem of every person who ever lived and ever would live.

Jesus became that day the propitiation. I John 2:1 *“…Jesus Christ the righteous: (2) And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.”*

Whenever someone doesn’t discern the LORD’s body, it means they don’t see Who Christ and why He shed His blood. They have been many throughout history who have, like these Corinthians, eaten at this table and didn’t see why Jesus died at Calvary. They’ve missed the most important event in the history of mankind. And yet, they ate at His table.

Folks, Jesus came here to rid you of sin and bring you into fellowship with God. He came here to take that heavy burden you carry, your sins. And He became a sacrifice for you. That’s what the word “propitiation” means, a satisfac-tory sacrifice. He took the punishment that you deserve for all of your sins. His love was so strong and so amazing that He could suffer, could become a sacrifice, and be nailed to a Cross in excruciating pain, suffering the most horrible death any human being could suffer. And He did it on your behalf.

If you come to the table and don’t see what Jesus did that day and you partake, you are partaking without discernment. And that act brings, according to this passage one of three things your way; weakness, sickness, or even death, verse thirty. I Corinthians 11:30*“For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.”*

So, yes, the LORD’s Table is really that important.

First, union with Christ precedes communion with Christ.

Second, the Communion Table is a table of remembrance.

Third, is the LORD’s Table really that important?

Fourth, and finally, the blessedness of communion.

The Bible uses the word “communion” to describe the LORD’s Table. And here’s why. Communion is a whole lot more than the simple act of eating a meal; and a very small meal at that. Here’s I Corinthians 10:16.

I Corinthians 10:16 *“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?”*

Communion is among the most precious words in the entire Bible. Let me show you what I mean. Communion means all of the following; sharing, partnership, fellowship. Here’s the Greek term [κοινωνία – pronounced koinonia].

And, almost every time you read the word “fellowship” in your Bible, it’s this same term “koinonia.” Just once it’s translated “partaker” and once it’s translated “make a contribution.”

Folks, if you come to this table, you are announcing to those around you that you are in fellowship on two levels; one, fellowship with God; and two, fellowship with those who have been made right with Him through faith in Jesus Christ, God’s Son.

Paul tells us this in I Corinthians 1:9 *“God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship [communion] of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.”*

The only people who have a right to come to this table are those who have been called unto fellowship of Jesus Christ. Everyone who has placed their faith in the death of Christ may come. All others should never partake. But on the day and at the moment you repent and believe on Christ, then, by virtue of the fact of your having fellowship with God, you are invited to come to the table and partake.

So, folks, it’s wrong to think that everyone should come to the table. If so, this table is no different than the table in your own home. This table is clearly different for two reasons. One, it’s the LORD’s Table. And two, we remember One Person when we eat at this table, the One Whose body was broken and Whose blood was shed for our sins.

The key to partaking of these two elements is this; Jesus Christ died for our sins. Communion with God through Christ and communion with those around you who also know God through the LORD Jesus. When a person has been regenerated, born again, he or she is now in a new relationship with God and His children.

So, today, as we come to this table, think about it like this. Do you have fellowship with the LORD? Is there anything between you and Him and you need to confess? And are you in fellowship, in communion, with those around you today? Is there something between you and someone else here? The LORD’s table is a table where forgiveness is preeminent. So, if you’ve got an offense against someone here or if they’ve offended you and you’ve not made things right between you, coming to the Table and partaking of the elements is not and cannot enhance or help that relationship. The only thing to do is to go to that person and make things right. Then, in fellowship sweet, we come to partake together.

Do this, said Jesus, in remembrance of Me. Shall we pray? Hymn # 431 “Break Thou The Bread of Life”