

REMEMBERING THE SACRIFICE

1 Corinthians 11:17-29

As we age, we find that our memories become less acute and we tend to lose ability to associate names with faces and places and dates. That is one aspect of the problems associated with memory that involves details and specifics. There is another broader aspect of “remembering” that affects nearly everyone regardless of age. I’m not sure what the appropriate term is to describe the problem of failure to have a continual awareness of who we are and what are appropriate behaviors for us in various situations.

I don’t how many times my mother would make comments to me and my sisters about certain behaviors that others were involved in by saying “we don’t act that way” or “our family doesn’t do things like that.” By recalling these “admonishments” there were a lot of troubles that we avoided during those pre-teen and teenage years of our development and growing up. These expectations were stated and corrective reinforcements were applied from the time we started to walk and they continued until we left home (and sometimes beyond that time). This was a form of imprinting our young minds with conditioned responses that would last a life time.

The effectiveness of using admonishments or reminders depends on it being continual, consistent, and correct. The reminders need to be persistent and frequent enough to keep the behavior fresh in our minds. In being consistent, we need to avoid sending mixed messages regarding expected or acceptable responses to situations. Finally, the most important thing is that the conditioning be based on truth rather than erroneous ideas or philosophies.

Imagine the difficulty of trying to change the “mind set” or that which had already been imprinted in an adult (or even a teenager). This was the challenge that Paul faced with the church at Corinth. These new Christians had come out of a worldly, pagan culture and they had been imprinted by that culture. Years later they were still being influenced in their behaviors by the old ways of thinking. Much of what Paul had addressed in this first letter to the Corinthian church was focused on correcting erroneous behavior with appropriate behavior that would be consistent with who they were in Christ.

The lessons of the Passover and the Lord’s Supper were used by Paul in a couple of places in this first letter. These observances were intended to help the Jews (Passover) and the Church (Lord’s Supper) remember who they were and what that meant in living their lives.

While the Gentile Christians did not observe the Passover as did the Jews, there were lessons that Paul drew from the Passover rituals that were applicable to the way the church needed to operate. Earlier in this letter in chapter five, Paul used the idea of the Christian life being a continual Passover feast where we diligently and deliberately remove all traces of leaven (ways of the world) from our lives. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 5:6-8

Don’t you know that a little yeast works through the whole batch of dough? Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast— as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Therefore let us keep the Festival, not with the old yeast, the yeast of malice and wickedness, but with bread without yeast, the bread of sincerity and truth.

He returned to the sacrifice of Christ (our Passover lamb) which is the focus of the Lord Supper in chapter eleven. Here, Paul addressed an issue in which they behaved like pagans even when they ritualistically observed the Lord’s Supper. They did the ritual but failed to practice the reality of what that observance was supposed to teach.

With Worship – 11:17-22

¹⁷ But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse.

¹⁸ For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part I believe it. ¹⁹ For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you. ²⁰ Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper, ²¹ for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk. ²² What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? 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 will not praise you. 1 Corinthians 11:17–22 (NASB95)

The mention of whether or not Paul approved of what they were doing or if he needed to give corrective instructions can be referenced to the first two verses of this chapter. It was there that Paul encouraged them to follow his example as he followed Christ and to the extent that they did this, they were deserving of praise. However, the subject of how they behaved during their love feasts and the Lord Supper would not fit into the category of being praiseworthy.

It is bad when a person does something wrong and thinks that it is the right thing to do. You have known people who were proud of bad behavior. We see this in the secular world all the time. We can remember people asking the question "Have they no shame?" when they would be shocked at the behavior of some who flaunted their perverted lifestyles. The answer to the question is that such people really do not have any shame which is an indication of a reprobate mind.

It is especially bad when being proud of wrong behavior is in the church. Some folks at Corinth took a certain pride in the fact that they didn't associate with other elements in their church. They thought that this was the right thing to do. They felt good about the fact that they had better food to eat than some of the poorer folks and they enjoyed eating it in the presence of those that didn't have as much. This behavior worked to cause disunity in the church and resulted in harm rather than good.

Paul had already heard about the divisions and he had no reason to doubt that it was taking place among some (part) of the church body. The wording in verse nineteen is somewhat awkward in the English and it probably means that the same erroneous ideas that led to various groups within the church identifying themselves doctrinally with Apollos, Peter, and Paul would likely result in cliques in the expressions of fellowship within the church. The irony of such behavior is that such cliquish identification is self incriminating and is actually a public confession of the error of their pride. Their behavior provided a contrast among the rest of the church members who had the right attitude toward others. All of us are aware that some churches tend to have "in" groups. There is a certain amount of pride that goes with that. According to what Paul wrote, you don't get any commendation from God for being in the "in" crowd. This division was affecting the Lord's Supper celebration in the church. This celebration was supposed to remind people of the selfless sacrifice that Jesus made and to bring the church into unity; however, the divisions were so strong that the good that the Lord's Supper celebration was supposed to have was not being accomplished.

The original Lord's Supper, was carried out during and end of a larger meal that celebrated the Passover. Apparently (in the early church) the observance of the Lord's Supper was being conducted after an evening meal in which the church came together to eat. The meal before the Lord's Supper (agape feast) had become the focal point of the meeting and the members were missing the reason for getting together. Paul then reminded them of the purpose of the Lord's Supper.

With Remembrance – 11:23-26

²³ For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; ²⁴ and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me." ²⁵ In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new

covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.”²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes. 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 (NASB95)

You have to wonder how anyone could turn such a noble experience as this into a means to hurt other people. The symbolism of the broken body and the shed blood should remind each one of us how much God loves us and what a great sacrifice He made on our behalf. Not only is this ordinance to remind us of God’s love it is also to call us to follow His example of self-sacrificing love. The fact that Jesus asked His disciples to eat the bread and drink from the cup symbolized that they were to be participants not only in the benefit of His sacrifice but also in following His example.

It was obvious to Paul that the Christians at Corinth were not carrying out the celebration in “remembrance of what Jesus had done” but were using it as a means to help their own selfish interests.

Let’s examine some of the details of Paul’s account of the Last Supper which is the earliest written record of that event. Of course, Paul was not there but he stated that this account was “received of the Lord” that would imply it was a direct revelation from Jesus. The breaking of the bread and relating that to Christ’s body was done during the Passover meal. Matthew stated “as they were eating, Jesus took bread.” The earliest Greek texts of Paul’s letter do not include the words “take, eat” and also does not have the word “broken.” By way of comparison, both the accounts of Matthew and Mark have “take, eat” but do not have the word “broken.” The differences in the earlier and later Greek texts are thought to be attempts by scribes to improve and clarify the meaning of the older manuscripts by adding the words take, eat and broken.

We might wonder, what difference does it make if someone added a clarification to the texts? We could all agree that His body was indeed “broken” for us. What we miss are other possible meanings of the unedited text. If we take the bare statement “This is My body for you” without the commentary, then we might conclude that Jesus was saying, “This is My body to be consumed by you.” That would be a logical interpretation if we associated the Lord’s Supper with the words of Jesus in John chapter six (verse 51) where He told the crowds that “I am the living bread which came down out of heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: yea and the bread which I will give is my flesh, for the life of the world.” Of course, we realize that Jesus was communicating a “spiritual” truth to them and not a “physical” happening.

At the end of the Passover meal which was representative of the past that had led up to this epic time in the history of mankind, Jesus took the cup and related the content in a symbolic way to His blood which would be shed to ratify the New Covenant just as the blood of bulls had been shed when the Old Covenant was ratified.

It is apparent (whether it is significant or not) that what was physically done with the blood of bulls in the Old Covenant ratification was radically different from what was done symbolically with the blood of the New Covenant. In Exodus 24:8 we read

Moses then took the blood, sprinkled it on the people and said, "This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."

Compare that to what Jesus told the disciples to do with the content of the cup that represented the “blood of the New Covenant.” They were to drink it! Think about how radically different this was from the Old Testament teaching in which the people of the Covenant were forbidden to drink blood. We remember that this was forbidden because the pagans who practiced that ritual believe that they would obtain the characteristics of the animal that was the source of the blood.

Following this idea in a parallel manner, we could conclude that symbolically our “drinking the blood of Christ” would result in our obtaining the characteristics of the Source of

the “blood.” This idea would also be directly related to the words of Jesus in John 6:56 “He that eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, dwells in me, and I in him.” Note also, another significant difference in the Old and New is that under the Old Covenant the emphasis was on the external (physical), temporary practices and under the New Covenant the emphasis is on the internal (spiritual), eternal practices. The sprinkling of blood on the people did not produce any permanent change in the person but would last until the person bathed or changed clothes. The consumption of the blood would be incorporated into the spiritual makeup of the person which would be an everlasting change.

Let’s now look at the phrase “in remembrance of Me.” There are at least two possible ways of looking at this. One way is to say that the phrase means when we remember Jesus and what He has done for us, then we eat the bread and drink the wine because we remembered. The other view of this phrase is that we are to consciously eat the bread and drink the wine with sufficient frequency that we do not forget what Christ has done for us. In other words the two choices are to “do it because we remember” or we “do it lest we forget.” Given the fact that our memories are so fallible, the second alternative was the likely intent of Jesus’ words.

We have already noted the tie to the past with the Lord’s Supper emerging from the Passover observance. There is an ongoing application to the present in that the everyday consumption of food and drink for our physical bodies should remind us of the parallel spiritual need to have spiritual food (Christ’s body) and spiritual drink (the provisions of the New Covenant) on a daily basis. The future aspect of this singular ongoing or repeated ordinance of the church is that it points us to the time when we will celebrate it with Jesus Christ in His Kingdom. When that time comes there will be no need to repeatedly proclaim the Lord’s death (in which He died in our place) which is the central truth of the Gospel message.

With Examination – 11:27-29

²⁷ Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. ²⁸ But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. 1 Corinthians 11:27–29 (NASB95)

There are a few passages in the Scriptures that are solemn warnings and this is one of those. It has often been pointed out that none of us are worthy to partake of the Lord’s Supper since we have nothing with which to commend ourselves to God. Our worthiness comes only from the fact that we are in Christ. To partake of the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner is the concern that Paul was addressing. The purpose of the ordinance is for us to remember what Jesus did for us in establishing a New Covenant by giving Himself to be broken and His blood to be shed. If we use the occasion for other purposes, then that would be an unworthy manner.

The celebration of the Lord’s Supper ought to be a time of closely examining ourselves as to our motives and actions. Sometimes we tend to drift away from what God would have us do. We get caught up in the routine and forget that we are on mission for the King of kings. We can also drift back into selfish ways and forget that Christ died to deliver us from domination by our selfish nature.

Part of the warning that Paul expressed concerned the consequences of not properly recognizing the Body of Christ. This can have two aspects. The failure to recognize the Body of Christ could occur in the partaking of the elements of the Lord’s Supper as being the body of Christ or it could be referring to a failure to recognize that some other members of the church are members of Christ’s Body regardless of their station in life. The damnation or judgment that Paul mentions was related to physical sickness and death rather than eternal judgment and

damnation. Many modern Christians have a lot of trouble believing that sin in a person's life can result in physical sickness. This does not mean that all sickness is directly attributable to sin; however, sin can cause physical illness.

Whatever we do in life should be done in recognition of the Lordship of Jesus. Whether it is partaking of the Lord's Supper or going to the store to buy groceries we should be aware of the fact that He is Lord of all of our life. The only way that we can accept the salvation that He offers is to accept His claim to be Lord of all. He paid the price for that salvation by the things that the Lord's Supper symbolized. Since that act of His dying on the cross for our sins is the most important event in the history of the world, then we ought to hold everything associated with it in highest reverence and awe.