

1 Corinthians 11:27

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[0 : 0 0] we shall turn now to first Corinthians chapter 11 and we shall read from verse 27 first Corinthians chapter 11 and from verse 27 wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord and worthy they shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord but did a man examine himself and so did a meat of that bread and drink of that cup the Lord's Supper was ordained by Christ as a symbol of his people's unity and also as a means of grace it was meant to show the oneness of the church of God and it was meant to convey spiritual nourishment into the church of

God but because of man's perverseness it has in fact often served quite different purposes it has become in many ways a focal point of disunity of debate and discord and it has often been a means of spiritual loss and destruction because men have approached it in a very wrong spirit and with quite wrong preconceptions we know for example that in Catholicism the sacrament is seen as a sacrifice which propitiates God we have the whole blasphemous apparatus of the mass we have the whole emphasis on the mechanical efficacy of this particular ordinance and the teaching that if we simply come to master to the sacrament then by that very fact we get some spiritual benefit no matter what our own faith or otherwise may be and all of us are conscious of the damage which this construction has wrought within the new testament church but we ought also to be conscious I would suggest to you of the very serious level of misunderstanding understanding which prevails on the subject even among ourselves there is a great deal of superstition a great deal of incomprehension and a great deal of unbiblical fear with regard to the Lord's table and I suppose that many of these find their starting point in the words which I read from this particular chapter the whole problem of coming to the Lord's table unworthily of being guilty of body and blood of the Lord the problem of examining ourselves the problem also of eating and drinking damnation to ourselves these are figured very prominently in our whole approach to the Lord's example and I want tonight for a moment to skirt these passages these verses and to examine some of the problems which they present us with and to examine some of the problems which they present us with we have the problem first of all referred to in verse 27 of eating this bread and drinking this cup of the Lord unworthily and we have the problem first of all referred to in verse 27 of the Lord unworthily now sometimes one has led to a feel that this is a free church discovery or at least a highland discovery but it is of course a biblical fact it is part of the new testament's teaching that it is possible for us to come to the Lord's table unworthily that is no free church dogma it is no free church dogma it is no free church dogma it is no highland dogma it is part and personal Paul's teaching with regard to the Lord's supper that this possibility always exists that we can come to the Lord's table unworthily but what does Paul mean by coming to the Lord's table unworthily?

what we ought to notice first of all that Paul is not talking of unconverted people coming to the sacrament there is no reference at all here to the fact that these people are not Christians there is no suggestion that the unworthiness is the unworthiness of hypocrisy that the impropriety is that of unbelievers coming to the Lord's table Paul doesn't give one single hint that these people should doubt their own Christian standing he doesn't raise any question about their being converted or about their salvation in other words the teaching which we have here is to the effect that it is possible for the Lord's people to come to the Lord's table unworthily it is presupposed throughout Paul's whole discussion that is addressing Christians and the problem therefore is one which exists for Christians that they may come to the Lord's table unworthily now of course it is true that the unconverted can also come unworthily but that is not Paul's interest Paul's universal discourse if I may so speak is one which looks only to the possibility of those who are real Christians who are authentic members of the body of Christ and living members of the body of Christ of the body of Christ and living members of the church of Christ the possibility that such people can come to the Lord's table unworthily you will see also that Paul is no suggestion to us the problem is that there were certain doubters coming to the Lord's table now it is of course true that sometimes the Lord's people do doubt their own salvation and it is sometimes argued that to come unworthily means coming in a state of doubt as to one's own salvation but there is no reference here to that and you will find in fact in the larger catechism that specific reference is made to this problem and that it is in fact laid down that doubters ought to come to the Lord's table or at least that to have doubts as to our own salvation and to have doubts as to our own fitness on the table does not disqualify us from actually coming to the comfort of this ordinance there are times when God's people may have subjective and personal doubts as to their own spiritual condition and those doubts may make it very difficult for them to approach the Lord's supper but those doubts do not take away the right to come to the Lord's table let me be bolder still there are situations when pictures of the gospel may have doubts as to their own salvation and those doubts may make it very difficult for them to ascend the steps of the pulpit but those doubts do not in themselves take away their authority or annul their calling

or revoke the mandate that God has given to them to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ and so I'm saying that to come unworthily does not mean that we come with certain doubts as to our own salvation in fact I'm going on to say this that the apostle is not speaking of unworthiness at all a speaking instead of impropriety now I say it because at one level that is the meaning of the Greek word which we have here it's a word that means impropriety and not one that means unworthiness but there is a more fundamental pastoral reason why the word unworthy is so inappropriate in this particular context and it is this that in the last analysis none of us is worthy of the Lord's table there is no such thing as a worthy communicant there is no such thing as a Christian who is worthy of any of the Lord's blessings because we know as believers that in us in our flesh there dwells no good thing we know that we are ungodly men and women justified by faith in Jesus Christ if we say we are worthy we receive ourselves and the truth is not in us we have to say even that all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags in other words I want the whole idea of worth the whole idea of worthiness

I want it ejected from this context it has no place here we all come to the Lord's table as utterly unworthy in the same way as we all preach or all fulfill our roles whatever roles may be in the church of God we fulfill all of those roles as unworthy people and we fulfill them in an unworthy way and when we come to the Lord's table we're going to find that very very often what we are most conscious of is precisely our unworthiness our unworthiness of Christ our unworthiness of membership of the church of God our unworthiness of sitting with the Lord's people in the privileges of this particular ordinance and so I'm saying that Paul is not referring to worthiness or to unworthiness he is referring to impropriety there were certain people and they were coming to the Lord's table improperly it's not that they were coming unworthily everybody was coming unworthily but these people were coming improperly or to turn the teaching otherwise what Paul is saying to us what the New Testament says to us is that some unworthy people may appropriately and may with propriety come to the Lord's table we may be unworthy and yet your coming may have a certain propriety but the danger Paul is speaking of is that those who were God's people were coming to the Lord's table in an improper manner and that is the problem that we have to face we have to ask ourselves how can the Lord's people how can they come to the Lord's table in an improper manner now I think that in the context of this passage to confine myself to that there are two answers given to that question the first answer is this that we come to the Lord's table improperly when we come in a way that violates the unity of the church of Christ it is improper to come in a way that violates the unity of the church of Christ bear in mind the precise details that Paul has in mind here if we go back to verse 20 in the same chapter we find the apostle telling us that they were coming together into one place but he goes on to say in eating everyone taketh before other his own supper now you bear in mind the appalling situation indicated there they weren't even waiting for one another it was taking the elements to express it in that way the one he himself thought fit making his own decision as to when to take the bread when to take the wine and he goes on to say one is hungry in other words a poor brother he had no bread

[15 : 06] he had nothing at all that he could partake of and another was tempted there was impropriety on this astonishing level it was a situation of total disorder we are told that it was an expression of content for the church of God despise Jesus verse 22 do you despise the church of God do you put to shame those that have not there was no semblance of order there was no semblance of unity there was no semblance of love there was no semblance of brotherliness in the Lord Jesus Christ now of course our church order will not allow the emergence of that kind of situation we have to wait for one another we couldn't get drunken in our communion service we couldn't through poverty be deprived of the bread and so these precise disorders cannot arise and yet in principle the peril always exists the peril that we shall so come to the Lord's Supper that we violate the unity of the body of Christ there may for example be another member beside us whom we dislike intensely there may be somebody whom we haven't forgiven there may be somebody with whom we are not on speaking terms there may be someone with whom we have an unreconciled and unended difference in other words you begin that whole principle referred to by the Lord in Matthew 5 you bring your gift to the altar you remember there that your brother has caught something against you and what do you do he says you leave your gift it is not time for liturgy it is time to mend the relationship the relationship now surely that problem is not unknown in the church the problem of drunkenness at the Lord's table that is unknown the problem of this outward disorder is unknown unknown but the problem of fundamental disunity between members of the body of Christ the problem of unreconciled differences between brothers and sisters of the Lord the problem of standing disputes between elder and elder between minister and minister these problems remain these problems remain and what I'm saying is that it is improper for the Lord's people it is improper for them to come to the Lord's table while those facts they remain as they are because they are violations of the unity of the body the sacrament is a symbol symbol of that unity we are all at the one table we have a common cup we have a common loaf we pass the bread from one to the other in a great symbolic ministry of giving and receiving

I may receive the bread from that very man to whom I am not talking I may pass the cup on to that girl to whom I am not talking and there there is impropriety at the very heart of the Christian church now I am not talking about simple theoretical possibilities I am in all situations where in the same church session there were elders who hadn't spoken or shaken hands for a year and each of these men would have claimed that he himself was a champion of the Lord's and that is a kind of problem that is raised in principle by the solemn teaching of this passage but it is utterly improper for us to come to the Lord's table while problems of that kind remain outstanding or let me turn the whole thing up what it said

I put it this way it is utterly improper for us to leave such problems outstanding because I fear some people say well if I don't go to the Lord's table it's not so bad I can then leave this great relationship I can leave it there what Paul is saying to us is that we mustn't leave that manifestation of disunity that infringement of love it has no right to remain it must be dealt with because otherwise every time we come to the Lord's table we are coming improperly because we are divided from the body of Christ it may be only one member of that body but in that one member there is the whole body and we are divided from that member of the body of Christ so the first element in the impropriety is that we come to the Lord's table in violation of the Lord's table in violation of the unity of the body of Christ the second principle is in some ways much more difficult and as far as in verse 29 we come to the Lord's table improperly when we come not discerning the Lord's body not discerning the Lord's body now what I am going to start with is this that Paul is teaching in this whole chapter in this whole passage emphasizes so thoroughly that the sacrament is Christ-centered the sacrament is about the Lord Jesus Christ if you go back to verse 27 you will see Paul's therefore whosoever shall eat his bread is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord the Lord Christ the offense given in improper communion the offense given is offense given to Christ we are guilty against Christ we are guilty against Christ against the body and blood of the Lord why so?

why you see the question for goes back to verse 26 you are showing the Lord's death the sacrament is all about the Lord the sacrament is all about the Lord it is about Eucharist or thanksgiving for Christ it is about commemoration of Christ it is about proclamation of Christ it is about communion with Christ the sacrament represents the body of Christ it represents the brokenness of the body of Christ it represents the life-givingness of the body of Christ it represents the offer of the body of Christ take it eat it represents the indispensable need for our own appropriation our own reception our own taking we must take we must eat it is not enough that Christ is not enough that Christ was broken not enough that Christ is within our grasp we must take it

Christ at the heart of the body of Christ Christ Christ Christ Christ Christ Christ Christ received and sealed it is all about Christ then some people don't discern Christ let me tell you a remarkable coincidence we have the same idea elsewhere in 1st Corinthians 2nd chapter where Paul is speaking about the natural man he cannot he says receive the things of the spirit of God why?

[24 : 49] because they are spiritually discerned the natural man cannot discern Christ cannot see into it cannot appreciate it cannot value it it is all summed up in the great and terrible word of his style there is no beauty that we should describe it you present this Paul the natural man with the incarnation he sees nothing in it you present him with a cross he sees nothing in it with a resurrection he sees nothing in it with a sovereignty of Christ there is no beauty there with a second coming of Christ there is no beauty there you tell him the land is all the glory of Emmanuel's son and he says well I don't want to go there there is no beauty there is no beauty there is no beauty there is no beauty there is no beauty he doesn't see Christ he doesn't appreciate Christ but you see the terrible thing in this passage is that Paul is speaking of Christians and saying that sometimes when they come to the Lord's table, they don't discern the Lord's body.

They are not approaching the sacrament in a Christ-centered or in a Christ-conscious way. They are not hearing or seeing the gospel proclaimed with all the symbolic eloquence of this great means of grace.

They do not see Christ. What Paul means is this. If these people had seen Christ in the bread and wine, they'd have waited for one another.

If they would have shared with one another, they wouldn't have been drunk. That was only possible because they saw nothing of Christ in the Lord's table.

The challenge I'm putting to you is a challenge whether we ourselves that are all attached to the Lord's table discern the Lord's body.

[27 : 24] Are we there in a Christ-centered way? Are we there, shall I say, to commemorate Christ because his memory is precious?

Are we there to proclaim Christ because we are so proud of him we want to confess him? Are we there to proclaim Christ?

I am hungry for Christ. Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness. Am I at the Lord's table because I say, Lord, thee my God, I'll earnestly seek my soul to thirst for thee.

I am hungry and thirst for the Lord. And I want the whole question of propriety. I want it analyzed Christocentrically in a Christ-centered way.

The challenge as I fence the Lord's table to use that whole Scottish word. The challenge I put to the Church of God is, Are you here to commemorate Christ?

[29 : 05] Are you here to proclaim the Lord's death to the kingdom? And are you here because you want to express your Eucharist, your thanksgiving for Christ?

Are you here because you are desperately hungry for Christ? And you say, Lord thee my God, An O■ bāon ■■■■■■iva. Impropropriety because we violate the unity of the body.

Impropropriety because our approach is not a Christ-centered but a Christ-related approach.

An impropropriety which is an impropropriety of which the Lord's people can be guilty. The terrible fact that sometimes as Christians we come with strained relationships to the Lord's table.

And sometimes as Christians we come to the Lord's table with our own burdens, our own fears, our own worldly cares.

[30 : 18] And there is no thought of Christ. The minds may be far away but Christ is not deserving.

He is no more before us. He is no more real. He is no more compelling. He is no more loving, no more winsome, no more attractive than he is to the natural man.

That is the question. Paul is going to you and me. Are we coming to the Lord's table guilty of breaking a church's unity?

Are we coming to the Lord's table guilty of not discerning the Lord's body? Well if that is what Paul means by coming unworthy or coming inappropriately, then what peril do we run as we come to the Lord's table in this way?

What is the risk? The risk Paul says is this. We eat and drink damnation to ourselves.

[31 : 29] And the word damnation of course suggests today, it suggests final and irremediable perdition.

Does not eat the ■ensin?

Theifi, he is the Lull, the troubles being united. I applaud him. Another great yoghurt.