

Let's Be Worthy!

Introduction. Several years ago, Alister McGrath wrote, “My aunt died some time ago, having lived to be 80. She had never married. While clearing out her possessions, we came across a battered photograph of a young man whom my aunt had loved. The relationship had ended tragically. She never loved anyone else and kept for the remainder of her life a photograph of the man she had loved.

Why? As she aged, she knew that she would have difficulty believing that, at one point in her life, someone had once cared for her and regarded her as his everything. It could all have seemed a dream, an illusion, something she had invented in her old age to console her in her declining years — except for the photo. The photo reminded her that she really had loved someone once and was loved in return. It was her sole link to a world in which she had been valued.

Unleavened bread and fruit of the vine, like that photograph, reassure us that something that seems too good to be true — something that we might even be suspected of having invented — really did happen.”

Because it's important, how can we make sure we're observing it and pleasing God? Paul instructed the Corinthians by saying, “Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 11:27). How can we be worthy? It comes down to four angles of consideration while we observe it.

I. Look Backward

- A. Paul writes, “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me’” (1 Corinthians 11:23-25).
- B. “Discerning the Lord’s body” in v. 29 testifies of His suffering.
 1. Paul shows how to guard against unworthy partaking of the Lord’s Supper. Some have misunderstood this phrase.
 - a) “Unworthy” is an adverb, describing how we take it, not whether we’re worthy (no one is truly worthy).
 - b) The Bible in Basic English translates the word “in the wrong spirit”.
 2. When observing the Lord’s Supper, each worshiper has to look back to the cross of Christ in order to remember and reflect on what the Son of God was willing to do.
 - a) Think of the torture and humiliation of His physical body (Isaiah 53:4-5).
 - b) We observe it with a respect for His sacrifice for our sins (Isaiah 53:10).
- C. “Discerning” means “to distinguish, to judge correctly”.
 1. If someone has failed to observe the Supper with the frame of mind that it’s a memorial to the body and blood of the Lord, they haven’t discerned.

2. A Christian is condemned by God by failing to think properly of the divine memorial, and by viewing it as a common meal to satisfy hunger, or as an opportunity to merely eat a cracker and take a sip of juice.

II. Look Outward

- A. Again, Paul writes, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26).
- B. “You proclaim the Lord’s death” in v. 26 testifies of His death.
 1. The word “proclaim” is translated “preach” or “preached” most of the time in its 17 occurrences in the New Testament. The language indicates the announcing is continual or habitual.
 2. We proclaim our faith in the effectiveness of the Lord’s death.
 - a) Most of us try to forget how people we love died because it’s painful, but Jesus wants us to remember how He died.
 - b) Why? Because everything Christians have is centered in that death; it’s a part of the gospel message (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).
- C. The Lord’s Supper is designed to make a statement. By eating the bread and drinking the cup in remembrance of Christ, Christians continually announce the significance of His death to one another and to the world.
 1. It’s not the life of our Lord or His teachings that will save sinners — it’s His death. That’s why we’re “baptized into His death” (Romans 6:3).
 2. Therefore, we need to constantly commemorate that He died for our sins (Isaiah 53:6; Acts 3:18; 1 Peter 2:24).
 - a) Rather than being a one-time observance, an annual ritual, or an occasional ceremony, the Lord’s Supper is to be engaged in “often” as a weekly observance.
 - b) But we need to go one step further. While I’m not saying that we primarily attend worship to observe the Lord’s Supper (contrary to some people’s beliefs), you need to seriously think about missing so easily. What we do here is important, and God deserves your allegiance.

III. Look Forward

- A. Paul writes, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26).
- B. “Till He comes” in v. 26 testifies of His coming.
 1. We also proclaim our faith in Christ’s return (John 5:28-29; 1 Thessalonians 5:1-2). If we don’t believe He’s coming, then why keep the Supper?
 2. The return of Jesus Christ is the blessed hope of the church and the individual Christian. Jesus not only died for us, but He arose and ascended to heaven. One day He’ll return to take us to heaven.
- C. Today, we aren’t all that we will be; but when we see Him, “we shall be like Him” (1 John 3:2). This is the confidence we have since His death has opened the way to eternal life.

IV. Look Inward

- A. Paul writes, “But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body” (1 Corinthians 11:28-29).
- B. “Let a man examine himself” in v. 28 is an individual communion with Christ.
 - 1. “To examine” is to put oneself to the test as to the attitude of heart, outward conduct, and understanding of the true nature and purpose of the Supper.
 - 2. The Supper is a fellowship or sharing in the blood of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16). We commune and reinforce the blessings we enjoy through the blood of Christ (1 John 1:7-9).
 - a) His sacrifice was necessary because “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).
 - b) The Supper shouldn't be taken lightly in light of the high cost of sin. Furthermore, the Supper reminds us that sin is incompatible with the life of a Christian (cp. 1 John 2:1-2).
 - 3. The Supper is a fellowship or sharing in the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 10:16-17). We commune and reinforce the fellowship together in the body of Christ (i.e. the church), as we break bread together (cp. Acts 2:42; 20:7).
- C. Are we living in a manner that shows appreciation for His sacrifice?
 - 1. By living for Jesus (2 Corinthians 5:14-15; Galatians 2:20) and accepting the grace of God in our lives (2 Corinthians 5:18-6:1; Titus 2:12)?
 - 2. Or are we by willful sinning (Hebrews 10:26-29) and refusing to repent of our sins (Hebrews 6:4-6), crucifying Him again?
 - a) In one sense, the Supper is a very private matter between a Christian and God; a time to reflect on the past and to resolve for the future.
 - b) However, this “remembering” is not simply the recalling of historical facts. It's a participation in spiritual realities. Around the table, we don't walk around a monument and admire it. We have fellowship with a living Savior as our hearts reach out by faith (cp. Ephesians 3:17).

Conclusion. Many churches have gone to very long observances of the Lord's Supper, either through longer Scripture readings or comments that are made before the observance. Each congregation has the right to choose how they wish to commemorate it. I'm not promoting a longer time for our observance; given the simple nature of how the gospels record its establishment, I'm satisfied with the amount of time we spend on it. However, I want to encourage us to never lose sight of what we should be doing while the memorial is being observed.

The first Christians “continued steadfastly” in its observance just as they did in the apostles' doctrine, fellowship, and prayer (Acts 2:42). Christians should never lose sight of its significance. It's a communion or sharing of the body and blood of the Lord. It's a time for self-examination and rededication of our service to the Lord. And it's a means for building fellowship with one another in the body of Christ.

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