

## COMMUNION EPITAPHS

I condensed the six-sermon series into two presentations for the 2012 Florida Bible Conference at Lake Aurora Christian Camp in Lake Wales. Recordings of the presentations are available on CD from Christian Audio Tapes in Bridgeport, IL.

### INTRODUCTION

As we grow older we become more aware of our mortality. We realize we will soon be laid to rest 'neath the sod with a piece of cold granite marking our final resting place. On that stone will likely be engraved a pithy sentence summary of our life.

When Christians assemble on Sunday to keep the appointment with the Lord at His supper, there is customarily displayed an epitaph, of sorts, that prompts us to remember the One Whose death we commemorate. But I wonder if we have, in our relatively brief weekly observances, given them due consideration.

### In Remembrance of Me

Taj Mahal, an extravagant marble monument of love of a man for his wife, who died while giving birth to their 14<sup>th</sup> child, took 22 years for 20,000 skilled workers to construct. Few people today know that it is a testimony to a man's undying love for his wife.

The Bible contains many memorials.

- The rainbow to remind people of God's promise
- The twelve stones from the Jordan River bed as a reminder of Israel's miraculous crossing
- The Jewish Passover to remind people of God's miraculous deliverance

"On the night in which he was betrayed, Jesus took bread; 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."** 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."** 1 Cor. 11:24-25

Today, when children ask questions about the weekly observance of the Lord's Supper, parents have the opportunity to explain the gospel story to their own children – the meaning of the cross. It is important for us to note that He commanded us to remember **Him**. In remembering Him we also remember His covenant.

### REMEMBER HIM

#### A. **By means of the emblems**

- a. **In the breaking of the bread** – how His body was pierced for our transgressions (Jn. 19:34) – In partaking we should think not only of His crucifixion, but also of His entire ministry (e.g., sinless life, teaching, miracles) and how all of it comes to bear upon our atonement.
- b. **In the drinking of the cup** (contents) – When we partake of the cup we remember the blood that makes a covenant relationship with God possible.

#### B. **His abhorrence of sin**

- a. The blackness of sin and its fatal consequences are seen most vividly at Calvary. "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness" (1 Pet. 2:24)
- b. As we participate in the Lord's Supper it is appropriate that we face the reality of our sin and renew our hatred of it.

#### C. **His justice**

- a. On Calvary's cross is portrayed God's justice in punishing sin, satisfying His perfect law, even though it involved the death of His sinless Son.
- b. God is just and justifier of those displaying faith in Jesus (Rom. 3:26).

#### D. **His love and grace**

- a. For had it not been for Jesus' sacrifice, we would stand the punishment of eternal death.
- b. In the cross His holy wrath against sin and everlasting love for sinners met in the person of Jesus. (cross illustration – auto animation)

**Oh, the love that drew salvation's plan,  
Oh the grace that brought it down to man  
Oh, the mighty gulf that God did span at Calvary!**

#### E. **His victory over sin and Satan**

- a. **Heb. 2:14** says that in His death Jesus rendered Satan powerless. **Col 2:15** says Jesus disarmed and triumphed over the hosts of Satanic forces in His death.
- b. As we participate in the Lord's Supper, therefore, we remember Him Who is our Champion and King.

## REMEMBER HIS COVENANT

### A. Jesus is our Covenant.

- a. All the blessings of the covenant of grace are embodied in Jesus, originate with Him, and are dispensed by Him. Receiving the grace of salvation and receiving Jesus are one and the same. He is our covenant.
- b. When we observe the Lord's supper, we are remembering that we have appropriated Jesus as our covenant, into which we entered when we entered into Christ.

### B. Communion is not merely a ceremony, but the commemoration of a covenant!

- a. The Lord's Supper is a weekly reminder that we share in a Divine Person and not a system of rituals (Fowler, p. 213). The Corinthian Christians needed to be chastised because they were observing the ritual but not partaking of the covenant.
- b. The Lord's Supper is a weekly occasion to remember and renew the vows we took upon ourselves as we entered this covenant.

## TRANSITION

The anniversary of my marriage is May 10. It is an occasion to remember not merely a ceremony, but rather a covenant into which I entered. On that day I remember the person I married and all that she has brought to my life (e.g., completeness, children, intelligence). But I should also recall the commitment I made and evaluate my faithfulness in keeping them.

## Crushed for Our Iniquities

Isaiah 53:5 He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities.

Matt. 26:38 He told [the disciples], "My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." NLT

Luke 22:44 And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground.

On the night of His betrayal, Jesus' prayers in Gethsemane were so fervent that His sweat became like drops of blood. How fitting. For the word "Gethsemane" is derived from the Aramaic word that means "oil press." With the cross on the horizon, Jesus' blood is beginning to be pressed out like oil from olives.

This epitaph prompts us to consider the weight of the burden our Lord bore at Calvary. How convicting it is to realize our sin contributed to the weight that squeezed the life blood out of Jesus; that His agony in the garden was due to the intense pressure represented by our sin; that He endured six hours of most excruciating pain as he hung on Calvary's cross.

## WEIGHT OF MY SIN

How much does sin weigh? Although it is impossible to weigh, we know that

- The first sin we committed exceeded the limit, thereby disqualifying us from entering heaven.
- It weighs so much that we cannot throw it off by our own power.

Hebrews 12:2 instructs us to "strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up." Even then, we must cast our sins upon Jesus.

**I lay my sins on Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God.**

**He bears them all, and frees us from the accursed load.**

**I bring my guilt to Jesus, to wash my crimson stains**

**White in His blood most precious, till not a stain remains.** -- Horatius Bonar

Greek mythology touted the strength of Atlas, who is always depicted as carrying the weight of the world on his back and shoulders. But that is nothing in comparison to the real weight of the world, which only Jesus can carry. In Gethsemane's garden He was being crushed beneath the weight of our sins, which He then carried to the crest of Golgotha's hill, where He nailed them to that tree.

Jesus' suffering was more spiritual than physical, as the cross represents the catastrophic conflict between God's love and holiness. The burden of mankind's sin was so heavy, so spiritually intense, emotionally demanding and physically extreme that it pressed the life blood out of the very Son of God.

## GRIEF OF MY GUILT

In the process of conversion we experienced the grief caused by guilt and know how exhausting and debilitating it can be. The Bible provides several examples of people who grieved over their guilt and how they responded.

- David, confronted by his terrible sins of adultery and murder, cried out to God for mercy. "Wash me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin. For I recognize my rebellion; it haunts me day and night" (Ps. 51:2, 3).

- Judas, filled with remorse after betraying the Lord, said, “I have sinned, for I have betrayed an innocent man” (Matt. 27:1-5). The grief of his guilt prompted him to commit suicide.
- Peter, feeling the grief of his guilt after denying his association with Jesus, went away and wept bitterly (Matt. 26:74-75).

Is. 53:3 says Jesus was a Man of sorrows Who was acquainted with deepest grief. Verse 10 says “it was the Lord’s good plan to crush him and cause him grief.” Jesus, in Gethsemane, “became anguished and distressed. He told [His disciples], ‘My soul is crushed with grief to the point of death’” (Matt. 26:38). He had no grief from His own guilt, but plenty due to ours.

David celebrates the relief from the burden of guilt (Ps. 32:2,5). “What joy for those whose record the Lord has cleared of guilt. . . . You forgave me! All my guilt is gone!”

**My Savior’s Love** Charles H. Gabriel

I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene

And wonder how He could love me, a sinner, condemned, unclean.

He took my sins and my sorrows, He made them his very own

He bore the burden to Calvary and suffered and died alone.

For me it was in the garden he prayed, “Not My will, but Thine.”

He had no tears for His own grief, but sweat drops of blood for mine.

How marvelous! How wonderful! And my song shall ever be:

How marvelous! How wonderful is my Savior’s love for me!

### **BURDEN OF MY CONSEQUENCES**

The Bible cannot state the consequences of sin more clearly than does Paul in Rom. 6:23, where he says the wages of / payment for sin is death – eternal separation from God. Because Jesus paid that penalty for us, Paul could add the truth that the free gift God gives us through Jesus Christ is life everlasting / eternal. That is grace! Grace does not relax the demands of the law, but rather provides the payment by a substitute. Our punishment fell upon Jesus.

I understand that the word translated “crushed” in Isaiah 53 is the same word translated “contrite” at Ps. 51:17. A contrite heart is a crushed heart. We should agonize over our sins that nailed Jesus to the cross. Our response when partaking of the Lord’s Supper should be a broken and contrite heart.

When we come to the table, it should be with the **realization** that it represents a seismic conflict the likes of which have never been matched. And it should be with the **resolution** that we will react to sin with holy hatred. We are confronted with the awful weight of our sin – not that the weight is such a heavy burden for **us** but that our sin was a burden that the Lord should have never had to carry. Instead of thinking in terms of the trouble my sins have caused me, I am faced with the realization that my sins have created a cosmic conflict in the nature of God, whose justice must respond in wrath but whose grace desires to respond in love. We come with the realization that our burden of sin was laid upon Jesus at the cross and that He bore that burden. We receive the emblems of His body and blood in celebration of the fact that we are now forgiven people as a result of His sacrificial death.

**TRANSITION** As we partake of His body and blood in our weekly supper date with Jesus, we normally think of the **whip**, the **hammer and the nails**, the **cross and the crown** of thorns. But it was our **sin** that pressed the life blood out of Jesus. The weight of the cross was not measured in the pounds of the wood, but in the emotional and spiritual conflict created as the sinless Son of God is confronted by our sin. When we eat of the loaf and drink from the cup we should remember the weight of our sin and the grief of our guilt from which we were relieved and released when we, in baptism, were buried into His death and raised in the likeness of His resurrection. We should rejoice that the burden of our consequences was removed through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus.

### **By His Wounds We are Healed**

Jesus was hard pressed by the weight of our sin and the burden of our guilt – so much so that in the garden He sweat as it were great drops of blood. Our sin ruined our peaceful relationship with God, which grieved our Lord immensely. Beyond the agony in the garden, however, was the punishment for our disobedience, as required by His perfect law.

The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, and by His scourging we are healed. Is. 53:5

He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. 1 Pet. 2:24

Our hearts are conflicted by this epitaph because the healing we need necessitated the death of our Healer. We are horrified that the perfect Lamb of God suffered such hostility against Himself by sinners (Heb. 12:3), not only because of our sins, but also so that we could be healed.

## BY HIS WOUNDS

Not by His words, but by His wounds.

- He Who called into existence this vast universe by the power of His word could atone for our sin only by His wounds.
- He whose words, "Peace. Be still," calmed the wind and the waves could not affect our peace with God with mere words, but by His wounds.
- He Who demonstrated his authority to forgive sins by telling the paralyzed man to pick up his stretcher and go home (Lk.5 :24) could make us ready to go to our eternal home only by taking our punishment upon Himself.

Not by His touch, but by His wounds.

- Jesus' touch would affect the removal of a fever (Peter's mother-in-law; Matt. 8:15). But our healing required His wounds.
- The daughter of the synagogue official was raised from her death bed when Jesus took her by the hand (Matt. 9:18-25). But resurrection to eternal life demands the sacrifice of the sinless Son of God.
- The two blind men received their sight when Jesus touched their eyes (Matt. 9:27-30). But it is only because Jesus was willing to suffer the chastisement for our sins that we have the hope of seeing the glories of heaven.

## WE ARE HEALED

In the Lord's Supper the Christian commemorates and celebrates his healing that is both legal and medicinal. Because of our sin, we are guilty. We are under the condemnation of the law's penalty. But in His atoning sacrifice we have been offered forgiveness, the release from the penalty of God's law because He paid it for us. Furthermore, He provided the remedy for our weakened condition of spiritual sickness by giving us the power to overcome temptation and to obey Him. This help He provided by sending the Holy Spirit to dwell within us. He is at once the seal of our salvation, the stamp that authenticates us as belonging to God, and our guide Who shows us the way of the Lord.

This salvation we celebrate in the Lord's Supper. Because Jesus paid the penalty of eternal death, we have the opportunity to be healed, that is, forgiven and set free from the power and penalty of sin.

## CONCLUSION

R.G. Lee tells a beautiful story about a mountain school that had a hard time keeping a teacher. Partly because of where they were and partly because there was a group of big, rough boys who took pride in running the teachers off. The biggest and roughest of them all was named Tom.

A new young teacher won over the boys, however, by letting them write their own rules for the school. It turned out that the boys expected the rules to be very strictly enforced with a rod. This was during the days when corporal punishment was allowed in schools. For example, cheating would be punished with five strokes of the rod, and stealing with ten strokes. All punishment had to be given with the offender's coat off.

Everything went well until one day Tom's lunch was stolen. A frail little boy in hand-me-down clothes that were too big for him admitted his guilt. The students demanded that this boy be whipped. When the teacher called the little boy up front, he came whimpering and begging to leave his coat on. The other students insisted that he obey the rules and take off his coat. When he did, a deathly silence settled over the room. This frail little boy had no shirt on and his emaciated body looked like skin stretched over bones. The teacher gasped and dropped the rod. He knew he could never whip that little boy.

Suddenly, big tough Tom strode up and stood between the teacher and the boy. "I'll take it for him, Teacher. After all it was my lunch he stole." And then Tom pulled off his coat. Reluctantly the teacher started. After the third blow the switch broke. The teacher threw it in the corner and said, "That's all. School dismissed."

The frail little boy laid his hand on big Tom's arm and through his tears said, "Thank you, Tom. That would have killed me."

In his book, "Written in Blood," Robert Coleman tells the story of a little boy whose sister needed a blood transfusion. The doctor explained that she had the same disease the boy had recovered from two years earlier. Her only chance for recovery was a transfusion from someone who had previously conquered the disease. Since the two children had the same rare blood type, the boy was the ideal donor.

"Would you give your blood to Mary?" the doctor asked. Johnny hesitated. His lower lip started to tremble. Then he smiled and said, "Sure, for my sister."

Soon the two children were wheeled into the hospital room, Mary, pale and thin; Johnny, robust and healthy. Neither spoke, but when their eyes met, Johnny grinned.

As the nurse inserted the needle into his arm, Johnny's smile faded. He watched the blood flow through the tube.

With the ordeal almost over, his voice, slightly shaky, broke the silence, "Doctor, when do I die?" Only then did the doctor realize why Johnny had hesitated, why his lip had trembled when he'd agreed to donate his blood. He'd thought giving his blood to his sister meant giving up his life. In that brief moment, he'd made his great decision.

"The Passion of the Christ," the award-winning movie directed by Mel Gibson, graphically depicts the chastisement Jesus bore. It was rated R because of the violence it portrayed.

Kenneth Wuest describes the practice (First Peter in the Greek New Testament, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1942, p 68, 69 as cited by Reese, 1 Peter, p. 62)

"The Romans used a scourge of cords or thongs to which latter were attached pieces of lead or brass, or small, sharp-



pointed bones. Criminals condemned to crucifixion were ordinarily scourged before being executed. The victim was stripped to the waste and bound in a stooping position . . . (sometimes they may have been suspended above the floor by the wrists) to a post or pillar. The suffering under the lash was intense. The body was frightfully lacerated. The Christian martyrs at Smyrna about AD 155 were so torn by the scourges that their veins were laid bare, and the inner muscles and sinews and even bowels exposed."

Who could watch without emotion as each lash of that whip left open, bloody stripes across the tightly drawn back of our Lord? I remember the tears welling up in my eyes and the urge to stand in the crowded theater and shout, "No! No! No!"

That emotion should overwhelm us each time we partake of the emblems in remembrance of Him Who was crushed for our iniquities and by Whose wounds we are healed.

## **United in His Death**

Concerning the proper regard for and observance of the Lord's Supper Paul told the Christians at Corinth 1:11:29), "**The one who does not regard the body of Christ properly when partaking of the Lord's Supper eats and drinks judgment to himself.**" My understanding of the word "body" in this verse was limited for so long. I used to think that this verse meant that I must be cognizant of the fact that the bread of communion represented the broken body of Jesus; that to partake of it without the conscious thought of Jesus' body hanging on the cross was to eat and drink damnation to my soul. While I am not discounting the conscious awareness of Jesus' body being nailed to Calvary's tree as we partake of the emblems, I am suggesting that we are missing the real point of these words if that is **all** we consider. We are affirming that the "body" in this verse has reference to the church; that our regard for the church, as expressed by our *sacrifice for* and *service to* her, has everything to do with partaking in a worthy manner. And, as you will conclude, this is an everyday proposition, not merely a 5-10 minute segment of the Sunday celebration.

We derive this epitaph from Rom. 6, a passage that is actually about baptism, at which point we enter the covenant of grace. And we will consider that passage as we proceed. But the connection between our **entrance** into the covenant of grace and our **maintenance** of that relationship in the Lord's Supper gives us the opportunity to borrow the phrase for a communion epitaph. The connection may be stated this way. We have been united with Christ in His death, burial and resurrection at baptism. So says Paul in Romans 6. But we have also been united with His body, the church. Both aspects have continuing implications that we must consider seriously as we approach our worship in the communal feast.

The church at Corinth was blessed with every advantage, including the possession of every spiritual gift provided by the Holy Spirit. But it was also plagued by many problems, not the least of which was a factious spirit that resulted in division and strife. From the opening paragraphs in this letter, Paul chastises them for their divisions. Not only was it a poor testimony, but it was taking its toll on the health of the congregation.

One aspect of their worship that was adversely affected by their divisive practices and attitudes was the Lord's Supper. That which should have been an occasion for unity had become an occasion for division. Jesus' prayer in the context of His imminent death (John 17) reveals that the focus of His heart was unity among His disciples. Jesus died to bring all people together into His blessed grace family, the church. The church's observance of that sacrifice ought to honor the heart of the Lord by being a rallying point for unity. Divisive attitudes and practices should be among those things we discard and decry when we come to the Supper. Jesus teaches us (Matt. 5:24) to be reconciled with our brother before we offer our sacrifices. We cannot participate in the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner when we are divided and fractured.

As He entered the city of Jerusalem for the final time, Jesus' tearful words were, "**Jerusalem, Jerusalem, . . . How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing**" (Lk. 13:34). The weekly dinner appointment with the Lord is an occasion when He longs to gather His children under His wing. We must wonder if He weeps when His children come to His memorial feast in factions created by an ill-placed focus on ideas and practices that honor our traditions more than His Word.

It has been observed that the most segregated hour during any week is on Sunday morning. This points to the racial divide that is perhaps as pronounced within the **church** as in the **world**. As unfortunate as that is, there is a segregation much worse — the segregation among God's people. We must do all we can to eliminate racism. And we must devote ourselves to eliminate all segregation, discrimination and division that

hinder the church in worship -- especially as it affects the observance of the Lord's Supper. The communion is an occasion to celebrate our unity as a family. But this has been hindered and prevented many times by attitudes and actions that contribute to division.

It is possible to have a communion service without there being real communion. [Aside: No one should eat alone. Sit with widows, singles, etc.] Two aspects of Jesus' life of sacrifice that were exemplified at Calvary and that are crucial to being united in His death are self-denial and service.

### UNITED IN SELF-SACRIFICE

Being united with Christ in His death at baptism is very important. It is the occasion when we die to sin and self and when we commit ourselves to living for Christ. But is being united with His **body** less important to our Lord? Can unity with the Lord be separated from unity with His body? This unity is displayed when the body of Christ commemorates that which binds us together.

It was the custom of the first century church to have a meal together before observing the Lord's Supper. This "agape meal" or "love feast" was perhaps an outgrowth of the institution of the Lord's Supper in connection with the Passover meal Jesus ate with His disciples in the upper room. In some respects it may have been a precursor of what we call potluck dinners. It was an opportunity for the wealthy to share with the poor; for all Christians to enjoy fellowship and to celebrate their familial relationship because of Jesus' sacrifice. It may have been the only decent meal some of the poor people would have. But the rich in the church at Corinth arrived early, ate their food in their exclusive circle, and some even got drunk. "The meal or gathering at which the social differences between members of the church should have been obliterated only succeeded in aggravating these same differences" (William Barclay, quoted by Paul T. Butler, 1 Corinthians, College Press, p. 211)

This disregard of unity among the Christians in Corinth corrupted the observance of the Lord's Supper, having a negative impact upon their communion with the Lord and with each other. This defilement of the communal meal that should unite all of God's people prompted some of Paul's strongest criticism.

How may this apply to us? Think about your attitude and practice when you participate in the Lord's Supper. Are you content to pass the trays containing the emblems of Jesus' body and blood to a brother or sister you do not know without making a commitment to become acquainted?

Partaking of the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner is not limited to our attitudes and actions at the Sunday event. We must be mindful of and honor the Lord's body at all times. This frequently requires each of us to sacrifice our personal preferences. This prompts us to address some of the controversies relating to the Lord's Supper that have threatened our unity.

Ronald G. Davis, preacher in OH and former Bible college professor, addresses (**An Occasion for Unity** June 12, 2011 Christian Standard) the sad state of affairs that the Lord's Supper has often divided those whom Jesus prayed would be united. He laments that congregations have become embroiled in disputes and dividing over various aspects of the observance, such as:

- Who should be at the table (presiding, serving)
- What the emblems should look like
- How often the emblems should be available (e.g., on Sunday only?, at both morning & evening meeting?, etc.)
- When during the worship hour it should be observed
- Where & how the emblems should be displayed (e.g., location of the table, covered with a linen cloth)
- One cup vs. individual cups
- Partaking in unison vs. as served

The fact is that the Bible has absolutely nothing to say about any of these issues that have tragically divided God's people. Sometimes, in our zeal to give this supper the attention and respect it is due, we focus on non-essentials, resulting in division, which violates a primary principle and purpose (an inherent quality) of communion. The Corinthians, by their factious spirit, had forgotten the purpose of the agape meal and, by extension, the Lord's Supper. When we allow ourselves to be distracted by the non-essentials we many times sacrifice that which is essential. The meaning is overshadowed by the methods sometimes. The mechanics can become more important than the meaning.

Listen to Mr. Davis' concluding exhortation. "Let no one quibble about who should or should not be here. Let no one quarrel over the manner in which the emblems are presented. Let no one fuss about the placement of these acts in the whole series of worship elements. Let all — in the spirit of unity — affirm loudly: 'We believe that Jesus is God's Christ incarnate and our only redemption and salvation!'"

Preserving unity in the Lord's Supper requires that we focus only on the essentials — what the Bible says — specifically, it is the divinely-ordained commemoration of the Lord's sacrificial death in which those

redeemed by His blood participate as Christ's body in partaking of emblems representing Jesus' body and blood. The first Christians met for this purpose on the first day of the week. To focus attention on aspects of the supper beyond this is to flirt with division, which negates the unifying purpose of Jesus' atonement, the very thing being celebrated.

Whenever we become distracted by personal preferences, we need to re-focus on the essentials revealed by God in His Word.

### UNITED IN SERVICE

In the midst of Jesus' predictions about His imminent death and coming Kingdom, the disciples are engaged in a discussion about chief positions in His administration. In His response to them Jesus said, "**The Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many**" (Matt. 20:28). When we are united with Christ's self-sacrifice in His death, we adopt His commitment to service. And as the body collectively is brought together by means of His death and our participation in it, we become a body that is united in serving each other.

Paul uses the Lord's relationship to His church as the example as he provides instructions about our relationships among one another. In Eph. 5:25-30 he says that the husband is to display self-sacrificing love for his wife by loving her like Jesus loved the church; and that he should love his wife as he loves his own body by nourishing and cherishing it. And as we are members of Christ's body, the same should be true for each Christian's relationship to his brothers and sisters in the Lord. Just as the husband is to serve his wife, so each of us is to serve the body of Christ.

But when is this service performed? We have affirmed that the weekly family meal in commemoration of the gospel (Jesus' death, burial, resurrection and return) is a divinely appointed occasion to celebrate our unity. But what we call the "communion service" is not really service at all. The service is done at all other times. This is part of what Paul may have in mind when he urges us to partake in a worthy manner.

Think of this by means of the marriage analogy, as did Paul in Eph. 5. How would your spouse respond and receive your expression of devotion on your wedding anniversary if you did not give attention to and serve the interests of your family the rest of the year? And, to make the analogy realistic, imagine the response of your spouse if you devoted only a few minutes on your wedding anniversary to acknowledging the family. I wonder how the Lord responds and receives our feigned expressions of devotion and worship the few minutes we sometimes struggle to focus our attention upon His sacrifice and service one day a week when we have not served His body throughout the week.

Unfortunately, this negligence is not unique or uncommon. It has been said that the ground is level at the foot of the cross. Every sinner is equal in his need of Jesus' atoning blood. And, receiving redemption through His blood, each Christian is equally a member of Christ's body, the church. Among the members of this body there is no king — only servants. (Butler, 1 Corinthians, p. 218)

It is appropriate, when partaking of the Lord's body and blood, to assess your service to the body. In what specific and tangible or measurable ways do you demonstrate day in and day out your unity with those among whom you partake of the emblems of the Lord's body and blood on Sunday?

Partaking of the body and blood of Jesus in a worthy manner requires our consideration and recognition of our familial relationship and responsibility every day, not just in a fleeting moment during a worship service on Sunday. And serving one another involves much more than merely passing a communion tray to our neighbor during the church's weekly observance.

When we pass the emblems, it would be good to verbalize our unity: "Thank you, brother, sister." And further to speak his or her name. Just think how that simple practice could enhance our unity!

### In a Worthy Manner

Regarding the body of Christ is involved in partaking in a worthy manner. Contrary to common thinking, Paul is here addressing the manner and not the man. Does anyone think he will ever be worthy? But who among us denies our need to partake of the emblems in a manner that displays **reverence** for the Person of Jesus, **recognition** of our great need due to our sinfulness and **respect** for His sacrifice?

Negligence in this matter of partaking in a worthy manner results in some negative consequences. Paul said it was for this reason that many among the Corinthian Christians were weak and sick, and some slept. Whether this is to be understood in physical sense or in a spiritual sense I cannot say with any degree of certainty. But I do know that leaving an unworthy observance unchecked will eventually profane every other aspect of worship by/with its hypocrisy and adversely affect the entire body. The ill effects upon the church at Corinth testify to the cancerous results when the Lord's Supper is observed in an unworthy manner. As is true when cancer is detected in our physical body, radical surgery is often required to excise it, restoring health to the body. Such

was the condemning nature of Paul's letter.

"God has never tolerated careless handling of sacred things." — Applebury (1 Corinthians, College Press, p. 211) Let us consider some practical measures we can take to honor the Lord's desire that we partake in a worthy manner.

### PREPARATION

Andrew Paris: "If God told the Jews to eat the Passover Lamb only after they had spent four days in diligent preparation, should not the Lord's supper — the Christian Passover — be eaten only after we have made a thorough, heart-searching examination?" (*What The Bible Says About the Lord's Supper*, College Press, p. 328)

William Robinson: "Perhaps nowhere was the preparation for the Lord's Supper taken more seriously than in the Church of Scotland a couple of generations ago, where preparation began usually on the Thursday before Communion Sunday, and included, not only prayer and preaching, but fasting. The practice is still continued in the Gaelic-speaking Presbyterian Churches of the north." ("The Administration of the Lord's Supper," quoted in *The Lord's Supper* by Gresham/Lawson, College Press, p. 58)

Robinson continues, "What might happen in any one Church if Celebrant and congregation were to prepare themselves by spiritual and mental disciplines over the weekend, and indeed, throughout each week! Would not the windows of heaven be opened to us?"

### EXAMINATION

Proper preparation includes examination. As such, it should begin well in advance of the Lord's Day assembly. Yet, I suspect that many Christians never give a moment's thought to this examination until the emblems are being served.

A personal encounter with the Lord demands introspection, inspection. The Lord's Supper is perhaps the most personal encounter we may have with the Lord, and it is appropriate to ask ourselves probing questions re: our relationship to Him and to our brothers and sisters.

Doctors uniformly say that the best treatment for cancer begins with early detection, which results from regular self-examination. This process of self-examination must be a daily exercise — ritual, if you will. How much more pleasing to God and purposeful to you if your weekly participation in this observance was preceded by self-examination that grows in intensity and focus in the hours leading up to the family gathering for the memorial supper? Are we properly prepared to handle the sacred emblems of the Lord's broken body and shed blood? Can it be said that significant self-examination customarily precedes our commemoration of this event we readily acknowledge verbally to be the atonement for our sin?

These probing questions are not pleasant. They may cause some to recoil and resist — much like the patient who has just been told he has cancer. Self-examination — properly done — is not pleasant. But it is necessary to maintaining health. The one who refuses to heed the indicators of cancer will grow weaker and sicker and eventually will die. Whereas the patient who faithfully examines himself, noting the warning signs and following the doctor's orders, will grow stronger and survive.

The Lord's Supper is a weekly checkup with the Great Physician. If we come, having ignored symptoms of sickness, our illness is only going to get worse. And we will die.

### MEDITATION

A natural outgrowth of examination is meditation. This is largely a forgotten discipline or exercise in contemporary culture that is uncomfortable with silence and with serious and critical thinking. But having examined our lives in the light of God's Word against the backdrop of our sinful lives, our boastful lips are silenced as we meditate upon God's wondrous grace, mercy and love that were displayed on Calvary's cross.

Simultaneous to meditation is the natural response of consecration, the dedication of our lives to God.

### CONSECRATION

Meditating upon our Lord's sacrificial love necessarily and naturally leads to consecrating ourselves to serving Him as an expression of gratitude and worship.

**Living for Jesus** Thomas O. Chisholm

**Living for Jesus who died in my place, Bearing on Calvary my sin and disgrace  
Such love constrains me to answer His call, Follow His leading and give Him my all**



O Jesus, Lord and Savior, I give myself to Thee  
For Thou, in Thy atonement, didst give thyself for me.  
I own no other Master. My heart shall be Thy throne.  
My life I give, henceforth to live, O Christ, for Thee alone.

## Until He Comes

Consecrating ourselves anew in this supper is certainly appropriate as we consider that Paul said, “Every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing (proclaiming) the Lord’s death until he comes again.” (1 Corinthians 11:26 NLT) It is a time of anticipation as well as retrospection. As we examine ourselves and consider the body and blood of Jesus, we also consider His return and how our lives are preparing for that Day.

### PROCLAMATION

In the supper we proclaim our faith that Jesus “died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, so that He might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18). But there is much more to this proclamation than what appears on the surface. Beyond the historical fact are some spiritual truths that should not only affect our emotions, but also our conscience. And that will impact the way we live in prospect of His return. In proclaiming the Lord’s death we are proclaiming

A. The awful nature of sin

Sin cannot be trivialized or rationalized when standing at the foot of the cross. Communing with the Lord in His Supper is to be confronted afresh with the horrible nature of sin. It is because of sin that His atonement is required. As we eat and drink, we are proclaiming that sin results in death.

B. Our guilt, the necessity of His death

The supper is the occasion when we are further driven to the realization that it is my guilt and shame that was addressed at Calvary. More than the general, nebulous sin of the world should be brought to our consciousness. By our presence and in our partaking we are proclaiming our guilt and our need resulting from our sin.

C. His holiness and perfect law

In proclaiming Jesus’ death we also announce our acknowledgement that the penalty of death for sin is consistent with God’s holiness. And that God does not ignore sin or treat it lightly. We also affirm that God’s law cannot be relaxed or reversed, since it is perfect. We acknowledge and affirm God’s justice in demanding death for disobeying His law.

D. His love and grace

The presence of sinners at the Lord’s Supper declares our testimony that God is merciful and loving, as evidenced by the fact that He provided a Substitute for us who have broken His law. We proclaim that God’s love provided a way to be just in justifying sinners by the sacrifice of the Perfect Lamb, Who came to take away the sin of the world. (See Romans 3:26; John 1:29)

E. Our hope of salvation

Participating in the Christian Passover meal is to proclaim our unworthiness and utter hopelessness apart from the sacrifice of Jesus. We announce that He is our propitiation Who has taken our sin upon Himself, thereby absorbing the wrath and punishment we deserve. We affirm at this supper the fact that there is salvation in no one else (Acts 4:12). Each forgiven sinner, in partaking, proclaims the power and extent of God’s salvation.

### PROMISE

Jesus is coming again! This, too, is what we proclaim. It is the same promise Jesus made to comfort His disciples on one of those occasions when He told them about His imminent death and departure. He said, “I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also” (John 14:2-3). Then again by the angels on the occasion of Jesus’ ascension after His death and resurrection, saying, “This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched him go into heaven” (Acts 1:11).

When we partake of the Lord’s Supper, it should be with the conscious awareness and anticipation of the Lord’s return. It is to be observed to the end of the age, the end of time, when the Lord returns. From that time on we will need no emblems to remind us of Him for we will see Him and be with Him.

### CONCLUSION

Remain faithful, not only in the supper but in living.

In a worthy manner and until He returns remember him Who was crushed for our iniquities, by Whose wounds we are healed and in Whose death we are united.

