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The Purposes of the Lord's Supper; 1 Cor 11:17-34

GPBC

3.24.19

Introduction – If we lose the meaning and purpose of spiritual exercises, the exercise itself becomes of no avail to us. There is no spiritual benefit whatsoever in simply going through the motions of spiritual exercises, activities, and worship. For the benefit is not in the act itself but rather in the faith that is behind it.

We read our Bibles to see and hear from God that we might love Him and believe in Him more. But if we lose that purpose, Bible reading becomes just a notch on our checklist. We are baptized to publicly profess our faith in the Lord Jesus. To announce that we embrace the One who died and was raised for us. But if we lose that purpose, baptism becomes empty ceremony.

And the same can be said of the Lord's Supper. There are wonderful reasons behind the coming together as a church for this meal, and if we lose those reasons then there is no benefit to the church or to our faith. It becomes nothing more than religious ritual void of the spiritual nourishment for which it was intended. That is what had occurred in the church at Corinth and can occur with us as well. We can grow so accustomed to eating a wafer and drinking a cup of juice that the meaning and purpose behind this simple meal is lost.

- I. The Lord's Supper is for Building Unity in the Church (vv17-22)
 - a. Paul immediately diagnoses the problem as division (vv17-18)
 - b. (vv19-20) Division nullifies the Lord's Supper. In fact, Paul says "it is not the Lord's Supper that you eat." You may go through the motions but you've lost the purpose, and therefore, you have lost the meal.
 - c. (vv21-22) The lack of unity is displayed and the loss of the true observance of the Lord's Supper is evident because the members are not there to serve one another. Humble service toward one another has been replaced by selfish taking and neglect.
 - d. This meal is meant to display and enrich unity in the church. If you lose unity, you've lost the Supper. Unity is of utmost importance in the local church. When we lose our unity we will inevitably begin to lose everything that really matters.
 - e. This entire meal is divinely designed to foster unity not division.

- i. Unity in the focus – the focus is Christ. We gather around Christ’s body and blood. Our focus is on our Savior and what He has done to save us from our sin. That singular focus should nurture unity. We come to this table as sinners with different ages, backgrounds, viewpoints, and concerns, but with all our differences, we gather around One person and one salvation great enough to override all our differences and make us one.
 - ii. Unity in serving. We serve one another in this meal. These elements are distributed to all, by all. Everyone serves everyone in the name of Christ no matter your social status, education level, ethnicity, or income. We offer Christ to one another.
 - iii. Unity in the partaking. We eat this meal together, in the presence of one another, sharing in the same Christ and in the same salvation. We don’t eat separately; we eat corporately. We receive Christ together.
 - f. This meal is meant to unify us as believers in Christ. If we lose that purpose, we lose the meal altogether.
- II. The Lord’s Supper is for Grounding the Church in Christ and the Gospel (vv23-26)
 - a. In order to correct the church at Corinth and refocus their attention on the point of the Lord’s Supper, Paul goes right to the beginning. This is how the Supper was instituted by Christ. This is what it is meant to be. This Supper is about Him, and if we keep the focus on Him, we won’t veer off course and lose its meaning.
 - b. The Supper is about Remembrance.
 - i. We are to remember all of the price Jesus paid to redeem us from sin.
 - ii. V23 – He was betrayed. Christ came to die for God’s people, but Christ is God. You can’t just kill Him. It’s not left up to man’s will and power. You won’t kill Christ upon your leisure or whim. In fact, many times the religious leaders sought to kill Christ and could not because it wasn’t His time. His death was entirely under His control. But there had to be a trigger that would set in place the events divinely designed by God for the timing and execution of His Son for sins of His people. That

trigger was betrayal by one of the disciples. Christ's sacrifice was brutal in every way, physically, emotionally, spiritually.

- iii. V24 – We are to remember that His body was broken on our behalf. He absorbed the punishment that we deserve. He stood in our place and took God's wrath for our sin. We are to remember Him when we eat this bread. The bread signifies His broken body. His body was innocent from all sin yet was broken so that our bodies, full of sin, might be made new. He was broken to cure, heal, and forever save our brokenness.
 - iv. V25 – We are to remember His blood was shed to cleanse us from sin and remove sin from our record before God. There are only two ways sin must be dealt with. It must be punished and it must be removed. Christ, as our substitute, paid for our sin by His broken body and removed our sin by His shed blood. When we drink the cup, we are to remember Him!
 - v. God saves His people through wondrous substitution. His broken body absorbed the punishment for my sin, and His blood was shed to cleanse me of my record of sin.
- c. The Supper is about Proclamation.
- i. V26 – When we rightly remember the bread is His broken body and the cup is His shed blood, we are in effect preaching the gospel to one another.
 - ii. This is the way of salvation – this is the only way of salvation. We believe! We believe that in the death of Christ is where we find life everlasting! We believe!
 - iii. The Supper is the gospel. Christ died for us, therefore we are saved! And we will keep proclaiming the death of Christ until He returns and our salvation is complete!
- d. The Lord's Supper grounds the church in Christ and the gospel.

III. The Lord's Supper is for the Sanctification of the Church's Members (vv27-32)

- a. It is vv27-32 of 1 Cor 11 that informs us and warns us that this meal is unlike any other meal. It is a visual portrayal of the death of the Son of God, the only means of the salvation. This meal is a visual portrayal that our eternal salvation costs the Son of God the ultimate

price. In God's eyes there is nothing more precious or sacred. Paul warns, "Do not take it in an unworthy manner."

- b. So how do we avoid taking the meal in an unworthy manner? 5 ways.
 - i. If we lose the purpose of unity in this meal we take it in an unworthy manner. We take this meal together to display care, concern, and love for one another as we serve one another, share around this table, and eat together. That's vv33-34.
 - ii. If we lose the focus on Christ and the gospel we take this meal in an unworthy manner. If we simply go through the motions because this is what we do once a quarter, with no thought and worship of Christ, no praise and thanksgiving for the gospel, we mock the very meaning of the meal.
 - iii. If we have unconfessed, unrepented sin toward one another. Nothing causes division more than harboring hurt, anger, or sin toward one another. There is no way we can display unity in this meal if we are not united. We must seek reconciliation, forgiveness, and understanding with one another before we partake.
 - iv. If we have unconfessed, unrepented sin in our own hearts. How can we rightly proclaim the death of Christ as the forgiveness of our sin if we indeed prefer our sin to Christ?
 - v. If we have never truly embraced Christ as our Lord and Savior, we take this meal in an unworthy manner. The very taking of the meal represents taking Christ as Savior.
- c. If we have made steps to keep unity in the church, Christ as the focus, sin confessed and repented toward one another and toward God, and truly believe in Christ for eternal salvation, this meal nourishes our faith and is for our sanctification.