

# Examine Yourself

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**Bible Text:** 1 Corinthians 11:28  
**Preached on:** Sunday, February 4, 2001

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... chapter 11 where we have read from God's Word the apostle Paul's instruction to the church regarding celebrating the Lord's supper.

The Church at Corinth was notoriously wicked and the letters of the apostle Paul in 1 and 2 Corinthians reveal the wickedness, the carnality, the sinfulness that was present in the Church at Corinth. There were immoralities. There were fights among the professed believers which even wound up going into the courts of law among the Romans. There was division among the people as to religious leaders and spiritual leaders and the problems, the list of problems goes on and on. And the apostle Paul wrote to them the strongest of his epistles of rebuke.

In the 11<sup>th</sup> chapter he addresses their inappropriate approach to the Lord's supper. And we take our text this morning from the 28<sup>th</sup> verse, the first phrase of that verse and trust that the Spirit of God might graciously apply it to us here today as we approach the Lord's table.

In verse 28 he writes:

“But let a man examine himself.”<sup>1</sup>

And we will take that one phrase as our text this morning.

In coming to the Lord's supper the Spirit of God says through the apostle Paul:

“But let a man examine himself.”<sup>2</sup>

Our coming to the Lord's supper this morning should be a time of careful self examination. It is the Spirit of God that exhorts us to this. And, thus, we are all appropriately exhorted to examine ourselves.

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:28.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

When Paul spoke this to the Corinthian believers there was the broad examination, we might call it, which would include all of the sins addressed in the entire book. And then there is what we might call the narrower examination which would include the things immediately within the context of the exhortation of verse 28.

On the broad picture we have already named some of the things which were problems in the Church of Corinth, the reasons why they needed to examine themselves. There was wickedness there which is not suitable for explanation or discussion in a public forum such as this. Immorality, deceitfulness, dishonesty, jealousies, abuse of one another, all of those things. I mention only in passing. You know what they are and with this regards the Spirit of God exhorts:

“But let a man examine himself.”<sup>3</sup>

What do you find when you open the doors of your own heart and peer inside? What is revealed there when the light of Scripture is suddenly brought to bear upon the darkness of the human heart and its contents are exposed for what they are before God.

“But let a man examine himself.”<sup>4</sup>

My friend, may you come to this table in that self examination. May you pray with the psalmist:

“Search me, O God.”<sup>5</sup>

For which of us can search himself as the psalmist says elsewhere:

“Who can understand his errors?”<sup>6</sup>

On these things already named, examine yourselves. Do you bring to the Lord’s supper baggage of such sin within your being which, in fact, is a corruption of the being and a dishonor to the supper which you receive? And while in taking the Lord’s supper we receive merely the bread and the cup which are symbols of Christ’s body, yet it is a symbolism of a true reception of Christ into the heart and should Christ be made to dwell where other such things dwell? That is the question that is being underscored in this exhortation.

“But let a man examine himself.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Psalm 139:23.

<sup>6</sup> Psalm 19:12.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:28.

If Jesus Christ were a guest in your home, what room would you place him in? What changes would you make to what is there in order that he might dwell appropriately in your home?

Well, the Scripture let us know that those who know Christ have him in the person of his Spirit dwelling within this tabernacle of our body and with what corruptions must Christ dwell when he dwells within?

And as you come to the table where the reception of these symbols of Christ's body and blood are received into your body, what baggage do you bring?

“But let a man examine himself.”<sup>8</sup>

And, of course, the examination is not simply an enumeration of what is there, but it is a dealing with what is there.

You go to your physician for a physical examination in which you anticipate not simply that he will examine your body and tell you what he finds, but then he will respond in a treating manner to problems that he finds. And this is the exhortation of the Spirit of God for us to examine ourselves. What do we find within on these matters?

That addresses merely the broad context of the whole epistle of 1 Corinthians, but coming down to the immediate context, I believe we can find four different things spoke to specifically on which we must examine ourselves. And if you go back to the first portion of our reading at verse 17 where the apostle proceeds in discussing the Lord's supper he rebukes the people of Corinth with these words.

Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse. For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.<sup>9</sup>

The first matter that the apostle points out is the divisions among the people at Corinth. And we read of those divisions elsewhere in the epistle where in the third chapter he rebukes them for having a sectarian spirit among themselves.

“I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas.”<sup>10</sup>

And he points out the fact that such divisions are not to be among the people of God, that when they come to partake of the Lords' supper, they are partaking of these symbols of Christ's body and by having partaken of Christ who is one, they are one. He is their life.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:17-19.

<sup>10</sup> 1 Corinthians 1:12.

He is their spiritual nurture. And, therefore, since they all partake of him, they should all partake together as one spirit, as one body. Thus, he rebukes divisiveness.

Are you harboring something in your heart against another brother or sister in the assembly? Is there in you that root of bitterness, perhaps over something that has happened in the past or perhaps not over something that has happened, but simply the old roots of jealousy and envy which create enemies who are your friends? But inwardly enemies, is there that divisiveness within your own heart?

The apostle speaks to this.

“But let a man examine himself.”<sup>11</sup>

For how can warring parties both meet together at the same fountain to drink? And how can those at enmity with one another both meet together at the same table and partake of the same spiritual food, even Christ? Thus, he exhorts, “Examine yourselves.” God has graciously sent a great peace to the congregation here and we give him praise for his faithfulness.

Yet there is ever that potential for we are but men and women. We are but sinners prone to sinfulness. We are by nature proud creatures, haughty and exalted who think more of ourselves than we ought to. And all of this is the formula for bitterness and strife and envy and so the exhortation today, “Examine yourselves,” is such to be found in any way, shape or form in your heart. May it be found and identified now and confessed and forsaken before coming to the Lord’s table.

There is a second matter that he addresses in verses 19 and following and I will simply paraphrase what has been happening.

The people at Corinth are coming together with food for the Lord’s supper, but it is an entire meal and it has ceased to be a spiritual event whereby they partake of the food remembering Christ whom it symbolizes. It has become, rather, a social event. But that is a stretch to explain it that kindly. For you have those with much who come with much and consume much. Gluttony is taking place. And you have those with little or nothing who come with little or nothing and they are left with their small little pittance. And it is transformed from a spiritual partaking of the symbols of Christ’s body and blood into a mere service of the natural appetites, the lusts of the flesh.

Now you did not come today with a sumptuous meal in your purse, not even with a sandwich, I would think, unless you expected a long, long message. You came today and the elements are provided in their simplicity, the bread and the drink. And so there is not the risk of us making a physical feast and gluttons out of ourselves at all.

Yet we come with more appetites than those of the stomach. We come with those natural passions of a body, of flesh and blood. And those can rule within us. And the near desire

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<sup>11</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:28.

to be seen can be an incentive to be present in the Lord's house and our coming to the Lord's table can involve many other things which are merely to consume upon our own lusts. And the appetites for food need not be the only ones addressed by this warning.

Examine yourself. What is your thinking and motivation in coming to the Lord's house? For whose purpose do you come? Self or Christ?

This is what had been forgotten among the Corinthian believers. And having forgotten this, the spiritual exercise of the Lord's supper had become a mere physical, carnal, sinful gathering. And the apostle exhorts them, "Examine yourselves. What are you doing?"

And that question with that emphasis is well put to everyone of us. What in the world am I doing here? It is an appropriate question for every person who fills a church pew. Why am I doing what I am doing? For even religious deeds can be done sinfully and, perhaps, more sinfully than any other for they involve a deceptiveness of heart, a hypocrisy.

Examine yourselves.

Then we look to the 23<sup>rd</sup> through the 26<sup>th</sup> verse and in Paul's exhortation, he reminds the Corinthian people what this is all about. Notice in verse 23 where he says:

"For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you."<sup>12</sup>

He says to them, "Folks, the Lord's supper which you are approaching with strife among yourselves and with gluttony and fleshly lusts. Hey, this I received of the Lord. This has come to me by revelation from heaven from God himself. I received it of the Lord. It is therefore not a man thing nor an earthly thing. It is of the Lord. A certain sobriety is due."

They had forgotten that. They had forgotten that the source of the supper was God himself. And they were not coming to a mere planned event from men, but they were coming to a divinely ordained and ordered act of worship.

We are prone to come to the Lord's table with the mindset that this is what we do from now and then at church which fails to recognize this is of God. This partaking of these elements has been revealed and handed to us from God himself. And therefore we should approach it with a sense of its source. This is godly in its origin.

And then Paul goes on to describe Christ's activity at the last supper where he presented the bread as a symbol of his body and the cup, the wine as a symbol of his blood. We are inclined to forget the symbols and that is something to be stressed, that we come and partake of this bread which is a picture of Christ's body. The bread is made from flour, the flour made from wheat, the wheat made by the hand of God as it grows from the ground. And all of those steps in the growth from the seed to the bread on the table are used to describe Christ himself.

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<sup>12</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:23.

The prophets Isaiah said of Messiah:

“For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground.”<sup>13</sup>

He spoke there of Christ growing among men.

Christ himself said:

“Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone.”<sup>14</sup>

Thus, the grain of wheat itself grown from that root out of a dry ground is a picture of Christ himself. That grain is taken and it is crushed and milled, a picture of Christ who was ground by the judgment of God’s mill wheel who came under the judgment of almighty God because of my sin and your sin. And then that flour ground at the mill is placed in an oven and baked. It was baked without leaven, sinlessness. For leaven is a picture of sin. And as the unleavened dough in that oven was baked, it was a picture of the fiery purifying wrath of God poured out upon that one who is the bread of God sent down from heaven.

And as the disciples were by Christ handed the bread and told, “This is my body,” indeed, it was in so many different particulars of its presence and of its origin a picture of Jesus Christ.

We come to this table today, its source being God and its symbols being Christ.

The Corinthians had forgotten that. May we examine ourselves that this might truly be foremost in our heart and in our mind.

And then in the 27<sup>th</sup> verse of this first chapter he speaks of those who eat unworthily or in an unworthy fashion.

“For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body.”<sup>15</sup>

And it is, perhaps, a less than best translation to use the word “damnation” there for damnation speaks of eternal consignment to hellfire and that is not what Paul is speaking of here. He is speaking of the condemnation of one’s own heart which comes to him of the judgment, if you will, of the Spirit, not eternal judgment, but of that self condemnation that comes when one handles things of God irreverently.

What happens when one handles the matter of the Lord’s super in an unworthy fashion and an irreverent fashion? Well, verse 30.

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<sup>13</sup> Isaiah 53:2.

<sup>14</sup> John 12:24.

<sup>15</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:29.

“...many are weak and sickly among you.”<sup>16</sup>

God must deal with them. God must chasten them. And the Corinthians had many among them who were suffering physical infirmity, weak and sickly, some of whom were, verse 30, sleeping, meaning they had died. Because when it came to the matters of the spiritual, they had dismissed any significance to them and in an unworthy fashion were approaching the things of God. And, thus, he says to them, those who eat or drink of this unworthily, in an unworthy fashion, bring judgment upon themselves, bring consequences upon themselves.

And the bottom line might be this. There is to be a reverent approach to the things of God. And this Lord's supper is one of those godly things. It is given by him. It is a picture of God incarnate, Jesus Christ and is to be approached reverently.

I think of an example of a liberal unbelieving minister who for the Lord's supper served hamburgers and Coke to his congregation. Now there was bread there. There was liquid and if there were nothing else available but a morsel of food and a liquid matter one might with nothing else remember Christ's body. But you know as well as I do that hamburgers and Coke are the backyard barbeque of McDonalds mentality of our age, all of which is totally devoid of any sense of reverence toward God. It is the casual, kick your shoes off put your shorts on and have a good time afternoon mentality. And our approach to God is not to be with ordinary every day casual willy nilly as you please, but it is to be with reverence.

And if you were invited to the White House today to meet our president, I am inclined to think you would endeavor to go appearing your very best. And you may not esteem the president, but the office of president is an august and noble office. And you would respect it.

When we come to the Lord's table, this is of God. And as the Corinthian people came together with spats among themselves and gluttony in the process, showing that they forgot the source and the symbol of what they were doing, they were coming in an unworthy fashion and Paul says, “Examine yourselves,” to see to it that you come to the Lord's table appropriately, reverently with a sense of what I like to call joyful sobriety.

The spirit of our day is so confused that sobriety is confused with drudgery. And that is not at all the case. Sobriety can be with the greatest of joy. And, in fact, true joy may be all the more intensified by the solemnity with which it is observed and experienced.

And that is what this is. We come with sobriety. This is of God. This is symbolizing Christ. And symbolizing Christ in his greatest work, the work of atonement, his blood shed, his body broken.

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<sup>16</sup> 1 Corinthians 11:30.

And yet we come with that joy for he was wounded for my transgressions. He was bruised for my iniquities. The chastisement of my peace was upon him and by his stripes I am healed, absolute, definite, a finished work. Thus he cried from the cross:

“It is finished.”<sup>17</sup>

For there I was healed. I come with joy, but with awe. And this is what the Corinthians lacked and, thus the apostle writes to them, “Examine yourselves.”

And as we come to the Lord’s table this day let us come examining ourselves.

Let us pray.

*Oh Lord our God, search our hearts. Revel to us what we are that we might make confession and truly repent of our sins, that we might not bring to this table the baggage of corruption, of lusts, of sinfulness, but that we might come in repentance, in full confession, in a recognition of what we are doing and in an appropriate sobriety and joy before thy throne. We take these elements, the simple bread and the fruit of the vine and in them we see the pictures of Christ, his body broken, his blood shed and we praise thee and worship thee for thy grace. Bless these elements which we partake and as we partake of them by mouth, grant that we might feast upon Christ by faith in our hearts that we might truly feed on that one who is the bread of God sent down among us who, as the food of the soul, is the healer of our diseases, the source of our joy and confidence, the lover of our souls and the one with whom we commune forever. Hear our prayer for Christ’s sake. Amen.*

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<sup>17</sup> John 19:30.