

Communicant, Examine Thyself!  
1 Corinthians 11:27-34  
7/13/2014

There are a great number of people out there who are saying that it is always and in every way bad to examine yourself. The words “morbid introspection” occur rather frequently in this discussion. “Morbid” means “gloomy,” and “introspection” means “looking inside yourself.” Now, there is a grain of truth to what these people say. There is a very real danger that when we look inside ourselves and see the darkness there, we can be tempted not only to despair, but we can also be tempted to wallow in our sin, and to be drowned in it. The answer to this problem, though, is not to stop examining ourselves altogether. The answer is rather to look to Jesus Christ often. Every sin we find in ourselves needs to drive us back to our Savior. The Scottish minister Robert Murray M'Cheyne said it best: “for every one time you look inside yourself, look ten times at Christ.” Well, our passage here this morning requires us to do a certain amount of self-examination. It will be important, as we consider this, not to make two errors. The first error will be to say that we should not be examining ourselves at all. The Bible does tell us to examine ourselves. The opposite error is to examine ourselves into black despair. Different people will have different tendencies, and will gravitate towards one of those errors. Remember always that looking to Jesus Christ is always right.

First up, we see the idea of unworthy participation. In verse 27, the unworthy participant is guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. In verse 29, the unworthy participant is eating and drinking judgment on himself. What is unworthy participation? Well, we saw some of what that is last week when we saw that some Corinthians were using the Lord's Supper as an opportunity to be rude to the poor. They were eating early at the fellowship meal, and were ignoring one of the most important things about the Lord's Supper: communion with one another! Surely in this context, that would be one of the major ways of participating in an unworthy manner. But there are other ways of wrongly participating. Obviously, if a person is not a Christian but decides to participate anyway, that is unworthy participation, by definition. A person who has no relationship with Jesus Christ cannot pretend successfully that he does have a relationship with Jesus Christ. That would be a lie. The pretend game does not match up with what is real. Another way of participating in an unworthy manner is described in verse 29 as “not discerning the Lord's body.” What does that mean? Some people think that it means not having a proper view of how Christ is present in the Lord's Supper. Others think that it means not recognizing the church. These views are too complicated. What it means, quite simply, is that we

must recognize that this bread and this wine are symbols of the body and blood of the Lord. If we do not know that this is the meaning of the bread and the wine, then we are not recognizing or discerning the Lord's body. If we think that the bread and the wine mean nothing, that they are not related in any way to the body and blood of Jesus, then we are participating in an unworthy manner. The bread and the wine are tied to Christ's body and blood in a sacramental way, as signs are tied to the things they represent. Remember again the illustration of the road sign that says "22 miles to Columbia." The sign is connected to the city of Columbia by a road. The sign is not all by itself.

Well, if these are ways of participating in an unworthy manner, then what can we do to ensure that we are participating in a worthy way? Before we answer that question, there are two other points to address first. The first thing is that we do not have to have a perfect understanding of the Lord's Supper, and know all the ins and outs of the debates that have happened in all of Christian history in order to participate in a worthy way. If that were true, then the first century would have had no worthy participants at all! As I see it, there are three things we need in order to participate in a worthy manner. The first thing we need is to be justified by faith alone in Christ alone by grace alone to the glory of God alone. We need to be Christians. Non-Christians cannot have fellowship with a Jesus to whom they are not united by faith! The second thing we need is baptism. Baptism is foundational to the Lord's Supper, since we are baptized into the church, which is where the Lord's Supper happens. We have to be a member of a church in order to participate in that church's sacraments. So, we must be justified, we must be baptized, and the third thing is that we must examine ourselves.

Before we unpack what that examination looks like, we need to note the second point that we mentioned, and this will help us to understand everything that follows. The language of this entire section is shot through with language related to a law-court. Notice these words: guilty, examine, judgment, discernment, condemned. In verses 31-32, the word "judge" occurs three times. The nature of our examination of ourselves is then related to the law-court. It is a cross-examination of sorts. This law-court language makes sense if we must be justified in order to be worthy. For justification itself is a court event. It is the declaration by God that the sinner is not guilty because of the imputed righteousness of Jesus Christ. That is why justification is so absolutely crucial. The only way we can be worthy to come to the Lord's Supper is if we are clothed in the righteousness of someone else, and that someone must be Jesus Christ. Now, as we are saying, we also need baptism and a correct self-examination. But justification is the foundationally crucial thing that we need. In fact, a good part of the self-examination that we need to do revolves around examining

ourselves for evidence of our justification. So we see the importance of the law-court language. So, part of our examination must be to ask ourselves whether we are in Christ Jesus. Has that judgment of “not guilty” been uttered over us? If it has, then fruit will result. The fruit of the Spirit, in particular, will be seen in the life of the believer.

This law-court language comes to a sharp point when Paul says that if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. What does Paul mean by this? Paul means that some people come very carelessly to the Lord's Supper. They have not even seen their own sin, much less been driven to Christ because of it. They have not judged themselves. We will be judged. The point is whether we will call ourselves guilty and submit to the Lord and flee to Christ, or whether we will say to ourselves, “Well, what I've done is really not all that bad. God will go easy on me. It is, after all, God's job to forgive people.” Do not ever forget that the only way for us to be forgiven is through the shed blood of Jesus Christ! That is what it took for us to be forgiven. God cannot just wink at sin. It must all be punished. Yes, that forgiveness is free for us, but it is not cheap. In fact, it cost the most precious thing in the world: the life of Jesus. This is one reason why the Lord's Supper is such an important thing: it proclaims the death of the Lord Jesus, as Paul says in verse 26.

This brings us to some practical considerations that arise from this self-examination. The first thing is that self-examination is another way of taking stock of your relationship to God. How is it between you and God? Be very careful here. If you answer to yourself, “it's not going very well right now,” that is not necessarily a reason to refrain from taking the Lord's Supper. For, if you judge that situation to be poor, then the Lord Jesus tells you to go to the Lord's Supper, so that we can become healthier! The point is not that you have a low view of your current relationship with God. The point is whether you have judged yourself in this matter! We need to come to the Lord's Supper in a self-judging way. That is what verse 28 actually says: “But let a man examine himself, and in this way let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.” How should we come to the Lord's Supper? In an “examining ourselves” kind of way. I have said many times at our celebrations of the Lord's Supper that it is not the table for perfect people. But it is a table for those who have judged their current spiritual condition, and have decided that they need Christ. Whatever our evaluation of ourselves is, we should come to the conclusion that we are hungry and thirsty for Christ. We need to know our need of Him. This is why we must confess our sins before God in the worship service. Normally, we do it during the pastoral prayer. Confession of sins belongs naturally in prayer. Make sure that you are confessing your sins to God in the pastoral prayer. Judging ourselves is a bit like a situation in which a person is all ready to blast someone else for doing

something wrong, but before the offended person can say anything, the guilty person admits his wrongdoing to the offended person. I'm sure we have probably all had this experience at one point or another. A great way of taking the sting out of a criticism is to admit your own fault. After all, there is only so much that a person can hit someone who is already down. Why wait for the Lord to humble us in a very uncomfortable way? Why not go to Him humble to begin with?

This self-judging is often accompanied by a chastening by the Lord. This is often uncomfortable. However, the alternative is condemnation along with the world, as Paul says in verse 32.

It is very important not to let any of these things discourage us from partaking of the Lord's Supper simply because we feel guilty of our sins, and our conscience is heavy. That's precisely when we need the Lord's Supper the most! It helps us, because when we feed on Christ, we receive strength to help fight sin and temptation. We renew our exclusive relationship to Jesus. This is proper introspection, a proper self-examination so that we may come worthy, in a way that is blessed by the grace of God.