

Turn to Jesus for Assurance of Forgiveness – 1 Corinthians 11:23-28

Pastor Colin Rieke – April 13, 2017

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴ 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.” ²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” ²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes. ²⁷ Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.

This is the day the Lord has given us a new command, a command to love each other,

As many of you are aware, I recently completed a 200ish mile, 12-person Ragnar relay race. The whole idea of a relay race, especially in Ragnar, is to run your leg and then pass on the baton to the next runner. In Ragnar, this slap bracelet was our baton that we passed on. One of the warnings we received from Race command was follow all the safety rules set up by the race. If you break the rules three times, you are disqualified, and they take your baton, your slap bracelet from you, and you would no longer be able to pass it on.

Tonight, St. Paul is talking about something much more important than passing on a simple slap bracelet. What he passes on is as *serious* as the truth of Scripture and as *precious* as the person of Jesus Christ! Did you catch St. Paul’s passing of the baton of truth? **“I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed . . .”** Paul received the truths of the Lord’s Supper from Jesus. Paul handed those exact truths on to the Corinthians. Tonight, the relay continues. What Paul received from Jesus and passed on to the Corinthians is precisely what I hope to hand off to you. As we prepare to celebrate a most sacred meal, the Lenten encouragement to repent—to turn in faith to Jesus—continues. Brothers and sisters: TURN TO JESUS AND RECEIVE A SPECIAL ASSURANCE OF YOUR FORGIVENESS.

If there ever was a church that was in desperate need of a refresher course on the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, it was the Corinthians. They had by and large botched their celebration of the Lord’s Supper. Instead of a feast of salvation, the Corinthians had turned it into a celebration of self-indulgence. Just before our text begins, Paul goes so far as to say that the Corinthians were no longer celebrating the Lord’s Supper (1 Co 11:20). They were celebrating, just not what Christ had instituted. Their consistent misuse of the Lord’s Supper left them feasting at a buffet of drunkenness and debauchery.

Drunk at the Lord’s Supper? How did that happen? In the Corinthian congregation, it seems that there was a regular meal called an *agape feast*, a love feast. This meal either included or was immediately followed by a celebration of the Lord’s Supper. About the closest thing we could equate this to would be to have a Maundy Thursday potluck supper with plenty of wine and beer flowing in the fellowship hall before coming here to celebrate Holy Communion.

Drunkenness wasn't the Corinthians' only issue. Some were using terrible manners—cutting in line, elbowing others out in an effort to look out for number one. Others viewed the Lord's Supper as a Golden Corral—an opportunity to cure a hungry stomach. The abuse that tops the list, however, is the matter of divisions: some of the rich wanted nothing to do with the poor; some people followed Paul, others were all about Apollos; some preferred Peter, still others boasted about their dedication to Christ. Instead of celebrating Holy Communion, they were celebrating an unholy disunion. Instead of a wonderful unity rooted in God's Word, they were squaring off into petty factions. They were bringing their lovelessness and self-indulgence before the Lord's altar! It is no wonder that we read toward the end of chapter 11: ***"That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep"*** (v. 30). The Lord's Supper had become the Corinthian's Supper—and they were not blessed because of it. They were sinning spiritually and suffering bodily.

How does Paul handle the drunken debacle that the Corinthians were mistaking for Holy Communion? He turns them back to a proper use of the Lord's Supper by returning them to the clear words of Jesus: ***"I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, 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, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.'"*** With the clear words of Jesus, Paul calls them to turn aside from man-made agendas and appetites. "This isn't your supper; this is the LORD'S Supper. This supper is God's gracious gift, not man's toy to tinker with. This supper proclaims Christ's sacrifice for you! It's not providing another opportunity to cut loose with friends."

The Lord's Supper is Christ's gift to us. In his Supper, Jesus gives us a gift that keeps on giving. He blesses unworthy sinners with the gift of himself—in a most wonderful way! Jesus' Word assures us that when we receive the bread and wine, we also receive his true body and blood for the personal forgiveness of all our sins. Jesus says, ***"This IS my body" and "This IS my blood."*** Jesus' body and blood are really present in, with, and under the bread and wine. How can the body and blood of Jesus be present? *I have no idea*. How can we be certain that Jesus' body and blood are present? This is how: *The Son of God, who does not and cannot lie, promises it!* The Son of God, with whom all things are possible, provides it! In other words, don't let your brain get beyond you tonight. The Lord's Supper is not given for your logical speculation or scientific investigation. The Lord's Supper is given for your comfort!

And we need Jesus' comfort! You come tonight as you are. You come with sins of youth and sins stockpiled in life's closet, sins open and sins secret, sins "little" and sins "large," sins accidental and sins willful, sins ugly and sins awful. You come as you are—sinful from birth and by nature separated from God! And in spite of all of that, Jesus comes as he is tonight—the friend of sinners, the Savior of sinners. He comes to you tonight "in mouth and soul to make you whole!" Turn to Jesus tonight for a special assurance of your forgiveness. Know for certain that *just as surely as you stand before the Lord's altar, just as surely as your ears hear the Words of Jesus' institution, just as surely as your tongue tastes the bread and your lips sip the wine, so surely do you receive the body and blood of Jesus—the body and blood given upon the cross to save you from all your sins*. There is no more personal, no more intimate way of bringing Christ's forgiveness to us as individuals than his Holy Supper. Jesus deliberately gives sinners the gift of himself! And where there is Jesus—THERE we have forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation through him!

Such a gift! That is why Satan works hard and long to get people to "drop the baton" when it comes to the Lord's Supper. The objections to Jesus' body and blood being truly present with the bread and wine

are many. Every one of these objections comes from people's brains working too hard instead of simply trusting in Jesus' promise with childlike faith. Some of the more popular objections include the following:

BUT "is" doesn't mean "is." What Jesus actually means is "this represents my body." The only problem is that throughout the entire earth, in every language known to man, "is" always means "is." Others will say, *"BUT how can Jesus' body and blood be in more than one place at once?"* The answer is, This is not the body of a sinful man. This is the very body of the Son of God—the same body that walked upon water and through walls! Others try to do the math: *"BUT how can Jesus give us body and blood, bread and wine all at the same time?"* Answer: How did God create the universe in six days? How can God be Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—yet only one God? How can Jesus be true God and true man in one person? The answer: *"With God, all things are possible."*

This evening, Jesus gives us his body and blood for our forgiveness and our strengthening. Let us praise him for it! Jesus deliberately gives his children the gift of himself!

Such a great blessing needs to be treated *reverently and responsibly*. It's that way with anything in life. We purchase a new car—a wonderful blessing. That car needs to be taken care of. The Lord blesses us with a child. That child needs to be fed, educated, and trained in the Word. The Lord blesses us with a husband or a wife. Our spouse requires our total commitment and loving care. Blessings carry responsibilities. So it is with the awesome blessing of the Lord's Supper: It needs to be received reverently and used responsibly—in a word, *faithfully*.

Paul concludes: ***"So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup."*** Because Jesus' body and blood are really present in this meal, we need to make sure that we are partaking of the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner. We don't want to run the risk of sinning against the very body and blood that is given to save us!

What does "unworthy manner" mean? First of all, let's be clear on what it doesn't mean! The Bible doesn't say, ***"Whoever is unworthy . . . will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord."*** Because who of us hasn't felt unworthy at one time or another before God. Jesus' body and blood pays for the exact sin that makes them feel so badly! The Bible isn't talking about *unworthy people*. If we needed to wait until we were *worthy* to receive the Lord's Supper, no one would ever receive it. No pastor would ever be worthy enough to administer it.

St. Paul isn't writing about *unworthy people*. He is writing about an *unworthy manner*. A faithful receiving of the Lord's Supper means that we will *examine ourselves* before receiving the Supper. There is a helpful picture behind the words "examine themselves." The same word was originally used to test gold to see if it was genuine or not. The picture is clear. We need to examine ourselves to make sure that our reasons for receiving the Lord's body and blood are genuine and biblical. Test yourself by asking the following questions:

Do I have sin? Yes! Do I desire the Lord's forgiveness? Yes! Does Jesus offer me his forgiveness in his Supper? Yes! Do I believe that Jesus' body and blood are truly present in this meal? Yes! Do I find myself united in mind and heart with what this body of believers believes and teaches? Yes! Now what? Receive the gift of the Lord's Supper, the food of Christ's forgiveness! He instituted it for you, just as surely as he lived for you, died for you, and lives again for you! Brothers and sisters, the Lord has passed on an awesome treasure to you this evening. He deliberately gives us himself when he blesses us with his body and blood. And so tonight, we turn again to Jesus for a special assurance of his forgiveness. This assurance is *always* yours through Jesus. This assurance is yours *only* through Jesus. Amen!