

Explore the Bible: Remembering the Sacrifice

March 20, 2018

- *The Explore the Bible lesson for April 8 focuses on 1 Corinthians 11:17-29.*

When we prepare to make our way to a destination, if we are thinking ahead, we will consider potential routes for our travels. Choosing our preferred route usually is not challenging, but when we encounter heavy traffic, we are left to improvise in order to avoid annoying jams.

For our text today, we are doing what is unnatural to us. We are driving toward the heavy traffic and congestion to engage a very tense and difficult part of the journey in 1 Corinthians. Paul has been blunt previously, but he is about to get serious. Ask your group: *Why would we want to engage uncomfortable issues?*

In his effort to teach true holiness, Paul reminded his readers, “Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31). This “umbrella statement” carries over quite literally to the topic of the Lord’s Supper.

With Worship (1 Corinthians 11:17-22)

Paul briefly addressed the Lord’s Supper and idol feasts in 1 Corinthians 10:14-22. After beginning chapter 11 with a brief statement about worship attire, he opens with the harsh critique: “You are doing more harm than good.” To think that gathering and sharing in communion could be harmful proves the severity of the situation.

For the congregation (or assembly) of believers to worship together, there must be unity. Divisions and separation due to class simply are not acceptable. In fact, they “violate the message of Christ” (Preben Vang, *1 Corinthians*, 153). Paul already has made it clear that because of salvation, there is no distinguishing mark between believers.

How do we see divisions and separations in churches today? What is usually said or done in response to these delineations? According to verse 20, in thinking they were taking the sacred remembrance, they were not in truth because of disunity.

Paul had to be clear here: You cannot take the bread and wine in remembrance of Christ if you are tearing apart those whom Christ brings together. This is a worshipful action that must follow Jesus’ terms. And all must have a seat at the table.

With Remembrance (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

Even though his authority as an apostle should carry some weight, Paul opens this portion with a reminder of Christ’s authority. It is his supper. So, he instituted it and passed it on. Paul also says this in a way that shows his “rabbinical pattern for authoritative explanation of entrusted tradition” (Preben Vang, *1 Corinthians*, 154).

He is recapping what we see in Matthew, Mark and Luke, as they detailed the Lord’s Supper. In a way, this could be seen as a “resetting the standard” because the Corinthians had veered off in the wrong direction. Perhaps when we are so far off course, we need to be reminded of the basics in simplest form.

All of this points to one word—remember. *How do we remember someone*

who was special to us? We tell stories. How do we remember Jesus? We tell about his love, and we have a meal he invited us to take. What we do then must show we are remembering Jesus, not forgetting his teachings.

With Examination (1 Corinthians 11:27-29)

This “examination” often is practiced as a quiet meditation or silent prayer before taking the Lord’s Supper. But when reading this in the context of Paul’s tone, we see that this actually is a confrontational call to repent before committing another act of dishonoring Christ (Preben Vang, *1 Corinthians*, 154).

It is true that we must examine our motives before partaking of the supper. It is also true that we should turn away from false motives and pretenses before partaking. In particular, we need to be sure we as a community are unified before approaching the table.

Ask your group: *What do you discover when you examine yourself? Also, how do you respond immediately to what you’ve found?* Perhaps remembering the psalmist’s words will help: “Search me, God, and know my heart; test me and now my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Psalm 139:23-24).

Conclusion

Perhaps the simplest way to receive this confrontational teaching is to admit that remembering Christ is more about lived-out action than re-lived story. It is true that the Lord’s Supper calls us to memory, but the action of taking the cup and bread is more literally being one with Christ in his love

and suffering.

We should indeed approach this time with “reverence and unity,” as our lesson dictates. But such reverence includes a healthy fear of mistreating Christ and his body, the church. Paul points out in verses 30-34 that consequences are given to those who abuse this sacred event.

As Third Day’s song “[Communion](#)” reminds us: “This is the body and this is the blood broken and poured out all for us. And in this communion we share in his love. This is the body and this is the blood.” (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5x6khRQF1Oc>)

Let these words echo outward through our actions, showing us as mutually changed people making up the body of Jesus himself.

Heath A. Kirkwood is lead pastor of First Baptist Church in Lorena.