

Belonging Because of Him

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

Introduction

How do you know that you belong somewhere?

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

¹⁷ In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. ¹⁸ In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. ¹⁹ No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval. ²⁰ So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, ²¹ for when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another gets drunk. ²² Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? Certainly not in this matter!

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 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. ²⁸ Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. ²⁹ For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. ³⁰ That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. ³¹ But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment. ³² Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world.

³³ So then, my brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat, you should all eat together. ³⁴ Anyone who is hungry should eat something at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment. And when I come I will give further directions.

Exposition

I. God's Discipline Demonstrates His Love for His Children (Vv. 17-22).

The church in Corinth was full of issues. As Paul described it, the church was full of divisions among the members, and they often tolerated sinful behavior that was unheard of even among the pagans. Yet, Paul held out hope for their repentance, as we can see from his letters to the church.

In our passage, the issue that Paul is addressing is the mistreatment of the poor Christians by the wealthy Christians in Corinth. The wealthy Christians enjoyed a flexible schedule that allowed them to show up at the regular church meetings before the poor Christians who likely worked long hours. The wealthy members would show up and start eating and drinking before anyone else could get to the meetings. By the time that everyone else had arrived, all of the communion bread and wine were gone, and the poor Christians, who likely had very little to eat in such a limited goods society would go hungry. In these verses, Paul is rebuking the rich for their disregard for the poor among them in the church in Corinth.

Paul's rebuke was essentially, "You think you are coming together for the Lord's Supper, but what you are doing is not what Christ intended. You may call it the Lord's Supper, but it's really nothing more than a pagan feast in the name of the Jesus. Christ intends for this meal that He instituted to promote and remind His people of their shared experience of redemption through Him, yet you are using this meal to perpetuate division."

For Jesus and Paul, the meal was about the people's shared experience of salvation. A salvation that comes to wealthy and poor alike. With God's salvation, there is no division between the rich and the poor because everyone needed salvation. There was no division. Everyone was in the same situation. Yet, the rich in Corinth did not like the idea that they were just like the common folk. In fact, Paul uses irony in the verse 19 to reveal their ignorance, saying, "No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval."

You see, the "Wealthy Christians" believed that they were more blessed by God, and if they did not take advantage of their supposed approval before God, then people in society would think less of them. But Paul would not tolerate such thinking. It was antithetical to gospel that He preached. Christ did not come to make us healthy, rich, and wise, but to raise those who were dead in trespasses and sins. Thus, in these verses, we find Paul correcting the wealthy in Corinth for their arrogance and misuse of the Lord's Supper. And this correction, this discipline, is a form of love from God toward His children. The book of Hebrews makes this point as well.

So, this leads me to a question that I believe we need to ponder this morning, "Am I willing to be corrected by God and His Word? When was the last time that you received correction or discipline from God?" It is so important for us to live in submission to God and His Word, humbly coming to Him and asking, "Lord, search me, know me, try me, and see if there be any wicked way within me, and lead me in paths of righteousness."

Praying in this way demonstrates our trust in God's goodness to correct and discipline us in a manner that brings Him glory and does us much good. Those who truly follow Christ want to be led in righteousness. They do not want to live in rebellion against God. They want to walk as the children that God has declared them to be in this world.

From verses 17-22, which teach us about God's willingness to lovingly discipline and correct wayward children, we now move to Paul's correction of the Corinthians faulty thinking about the Lord's Supper in verses 23-26...

II. Participation in the Lord's Supper is an Act of Proclamation (Vv. 23-26)

In contrast to the way in which the wealthy were using the Lord's Supper as a means of demonstrating their own self-importance, the Lord's Supper is an act of proclamation about what Jesus Christ has accomplished for us through his work.

In a manner similar to the Passover meal in which Israel remembered the Lord's deliverance from Egypt, the Lord's Supper was a meal in which the people of God remembered their deliverance through Jesus Christ.

The Lord's Supper was a reminder of their shared experience as the people of God. And this shared experience should have fostered unity among them, which was one of the biggest problems among the believers in Corinth. They were not unified. They were prone to factionalism. They liked to find their identities in things other than Christ. And one of the clearest examples of this division was in how the people were observing the Lord's Supper!

You see, it is our shared experience in Christ that unites us together. Of all our shared experiences, our redemption through Christ ought to be determinative of the unity in the church.

And you know what I mean by shared experience. When we share an experience together, there is a unity that forms. One of the most unified times in our country that I can remember was in the days and weeks that followed 9/11. As citizens of the US, what we felt and saw during and in the aftermath of those attacks, knit our hearts to our fellow citizens for a season. It did not matter if someone was rich or poor. It did not matter if they were a republican or a democrat or an independent. It did not matter what the color of their skin was. Yet, that sense of unity was relatively short-lived, as all bonds of unity outside of Christ will eventually be.

Houstonians know what I'm talking about when it comes to shared experiences. When Hurricane Harvey hit five years ago almost to the date. There was a shared experience that fostered unity among the city. And it's interesting, others who have gone through such experiences feel a bond with Houston. The people of New Orleans feel that way about Houston, and vice versa, because they have been through the same type of things. And there is a sense of unity in that shared experience.

The apostle Paul knew this, and God designed us in this way, so that when we comes to the Lord's Supper, and we are all reminded anew, afresh that we have been redeemed from our sins not because we are rich or poor, or well-deserving, but because of the great grace and mercy of God in Christ, our hearts ought to be knit together with the hearts of others who have experiences such redemption. That is what the Lord's Supper is pointing us to: our shared experience of redemption through Jesus Christ. And when we partake of this Supper, we are proclaiming our shared experience of God's redemption through Jesus, which is the ultimate and only lasting foundation for our unity in the body of Christ. No other tie will bind our hearts together stronger than the redemption that we possess through Jesus!

III. Examine Yourself in the Light of the Work of Christ (Vv. 27-34)

When the passage tells us to "examine ourselves" it is not telling us that we need to feel sufficiently guilty or condemned in order to partake of the Lord's Supper. It is telling us to remember why we are even able to partake of the Supper at all. It is because of God's grace through Jesus Christ that we belong to His people.

No one deserves to come to the table on their own merit. No one is rich enough or wise enough or good enough to belong to be a child of God. Our belonging is all of grace, and when we partake of this Supper, we are declaring that grace is the reason I'm here.

Conclusion

When partake of the Lord's Supper, we are doing so as those who are a part of the body of Christ by the grace of God through the gospel. When we eat the bread and partake of the cup, we are proclaiming that if it was not for the grace of God, which was revealed to me through the work of Jesus Christ, I would not belong at all.

The Supper should humble us.

The Supper ought to cause us to look at those around us, and as we remember Christ, we view those around us as those for whom Christ died. As those we are called to love and care for as members of the same body.