

THE NEED FOR SELF-EXAMINATION

My early years were spent in the Catholic Church and every Sunday I attended Mass. The climax of the mass is when the communion bread miraculously changes into the actual body of Christ. This was called transubstantiation. I was taught that when the priest placed the bread wafer into my mouth I was not to bite it because that would injure the body of Christ. I had to swallow it and being a thin wafer that was hard work because it stuck to the roof of my mouth.

This was one of the big issues debated during the Reformation when the Protestants broke away from the Catholic Church. And it comes from the very words of Jesus when he held up the bread during the last supper and said, "This bread is my body given for you."

Did Jesus really mean that the bread somehow miraculously became his physical body? Or was He using a figure of speech as He often did when He said things like, "I am the bread of life, door, Light of the world, Vine."

The bread in Jesus hand could not have been his actual body because His body was intact and was holding the bread.

We do not therefore believe that the communion bread is the actual, physical body of Christ. We believe that it represents the body of Christ sacrificed for us on the cross.

And when He said, "This is my blood of the New Covenant", He wasn't saying that it was His blood in the cup, because His blood was still flowing through His veins.

The other thing I want to point out from this passage is that the way we observe

the Lord's Supper is different from the way Jesus did it with His disciples and the early believers.

1. It actually took place in homes during a shared meal. At the beginning of the meal they took bread remembered Jesus and his death and then they had their meal and at the end they took wine and remembered the blood He shed for our sins.

2. As the church congregations grew in number it became harder to do it at a shared meal and so it developed into what we do today.

The biggest churches in the world today are found in Africa. Deeper Christian life ministry church in Nigeria has a Sunday attendance of 75000. Imagine having a shared meal with that many people let alone a communion service.

In this passage Paul says that when we come to the Lord's table we need to :

Consider what the emblems stand for.

Consider who we share them with.

Consider our condition before God

CONSIDER WHAT THE EMBLEMS STAND FOR v27

The bread and the wine represent the body of Jesus that was sacrificed for us and the blood that flowed from that body to cleanse us from our sins.

To see the bread and the wine as the literal body and blood of Jesus is one extreme. But the other extreme is to treat this commemoration as though it wasn't really important. And that was the problem Paul faced at Corinth.

Paul says, "When you come to this table and take the

bread and cup, consider seriously what they represent. They may only be bread and wine, but they represent the body and blood of Jesus given at tremendous cost for you.”

Paul says that if we come to this table and treat the bread and the cup with disrespect, if we are being flippant and make light of it all, we are disrespecting and dishonouring the body and blood of Jesus. We are actually mocking Christ.

It was Jesus who established this practice and if we treat it lightly we are dishonouring Him. The bread and the cup are only physical elements, but it's what and who they represent that is important.

CONSIDER WHO WE SHARE THEM WITH v29-32

v29 For if you eat the bread or drink the cup without honouring the body of Christ, you are eating and drinking God's judgment upon yourself. That is why many of you are weak and sick and some have even died.

This verse can be taken in two ways. It can mean honouring the body of Jesus as represented by the bread and it can mean honouring the Body of Christ which is the church.

Both of these agree with what happens at the Lord's supper.

And in Corinth the believers were dishonouring the Body and blood of Jesus as well as dishonouring their fellow believers when they came to the Lord's Table because there was a lack of love and unity among those who came.

And Paul says because you come to this table with bad attitudes towards your fellow believers, this meal which is meant to bring God's blessing to you will bring

His judgement instead.

And Paul goes on to say, *“That is why many of you are weak and sick and some have even died. But if we would examine ourselves, we would not be judged by God in this way. Yet when we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned along with the world.”*

This is an aspect of God’s dealings that we would rather to ignore, but God does correct, discipline and even punish His children, when they continue to ignore His warnings..

Hebrews 12:5 *“My child, don’t make light of the Lord’s discipline, and don’t give up when he corrects you.*

For the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes each one he accepts as his child.”

Because God loves us He must correct and discipline us, otherwise we will end up being ruined [spoiled].”

Sometimes, when we knowingly keep doing what God has told us not to do He has no other choice but to discipline us. Sometimes when we ignore what God is telling us to deal with, the only way God can get our attention is to allow pain or suffering to touch our lives.

I am not saying for one moment that all suffering and sickness is caused by our sin. I am simply saying that sometimes God has to use it get our attention and urge us to deal with on-going behaviour and attitudes that are wrong.

Remember Ananias and Sapphira. They behaved in a proud and deceitful way and God had to discipline them because their behaviour was infecting the early

church. He removed them. A while back Christians used to talk about being slain in the Spirit, but the only Bible example of being slain in the Spirit that I know of is Ananias and Sapphires and I certainly wouldn't encourage people to ask God for that.

III. Back in the 70s when God's Spirit was spiritually renewing many Christians and churches, there were a couple of men in a church not far from where we were and they stood up in a members meeting and said that they hated people who said they had been filled with the Spirit. Both those men died within the next 6 months. Gordon Wilson saw the same thing happen in the Solomon Island church during the Revival in 1970.

Sometimes, because we can be so stubborn and unrepentant, God has to use drastic measures to shake us up and wake us up and protect us from something far worse. Hebrews 12 says that He does because he loves us, for our own good.

III. In the Middle East it is quite common for a shepherd to break the leg of a wandering lamb to stop it wandering away. By the time the leg has healed, it has learned to stay close to the shepherd.

Paul says that if we come to this table with attitudes that are offensive to Christ and unloving towards our fellow believers this meal which is meant to bring God's blessing to us can actually work against us.

Just on the positive side. If this meal can bring harm to us when abused, surely it can bring blessing to us when we partake of it with the right attitude.

CONSIDER YOUR CONDITION BEFORE GOD.V28, 31-32

One of those times we are called to do this when we come to the Lord's Table. "A person ought to examine themselves before they eat the bread and drink the cup."

We need to examine ourselves and ask, "Is there anything in my behaviour or attitudes that is offensive to God and unloving towards others?"

In the early days of our marriage Lois would often say that she didn't have the love for Christ that others had or the deep appreciation of what Jesus did on the cross. She believed she was basically a good person and didn't feel the need to repent of anything or the need of God's forgiveness.

This is a very common attitude today even in the church. Why is it?

1. Because we judge ourselves by what other people say about us. If people keep telling us how nice, good, kind and caring we are, we begin to believe it. We find it hard to believe that that we are basically selfish, proud, deceitful, rebellious, indifferent towards God.

2. We judge ourselves by comparing ourselves with others. We look at people around us who are saying and doing things that we don't do or say and we think compared to them we are good people.

3. We judge ourselves by the accepted moral standards of our culture. If the current culture is happy with a certain behaviour we think it's okay for us.

4. We judge ourselves by our external behaviour.

The old Baptist idiom was "I don't smoke, dance, drink, swear or chew and I don't go with the girls that do."

The religious leaders in Jesus day judged themselves by their external behaviour. Outwardly they appeared good, godly people, but Jesus said they were like whitewashed graves, outwardly looking okay but inside stinking, decaying, rotting corpses

When God was choosing a King for Israel He said to Samuel, “Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because he is not the one. For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”

When God looks into our hearts He sees the real us, the things we hide from others, our thoughts, attitudes and motives. He sees the pride, critical and judgemental attitudes, deceit, unbelief, resentment, bitterness, prejudice, envy, lust, greed, hypocrisy, idolatry, unforgiveness. He sees those secret things that we hide from others.

The sad thing is that many so called Christians don't think these things are important because they are hidden from others and so they allow them to remain.

I want to speak about one of those hidden evils that we are unwilling to admit to and tend to ignore – pride.

Pride is basically self-deception where we deceive ourselves into thinking that we are greater and better than we really are and we want others to think the same about us. *Galatians 6:3 For if anyone thinks they are better than they are they are deceiving themselves.*

The proud person lives a lie, so we live a lie, promoting themselves, talking only

about their strengths, their abilities, their exploits, their successes. They always have to be right, they give the impression that they know it all. They don't like to be corrected. They won't show their weaknesses or apologise or admit they are wrong because that would be to lower themselves in their own eyes and in the eyes of others.

They criticise others and put them down in order to make themselves look better. We love it when they are the centre of attention, when people are praising them, honouring them and congratulating them and they work hard to get it. They are self-centred and seek only what will enrich and benefit them.

This is pride. It is self-deception and it is destroying so many people and their relationships. In all our years of marriage counselling I would say that pride has been the main cause of conflict and division in marriages. It also destroys our relationship with God, the Bible says that God opposes the proud, because the proud person will not admit to their true condition and seek God's mercy and forgiveness.

A Catholic priest who had been hearing confessions for 30 years and said, "No one has ever confessed to me the sin of pride."

But what they don't realise is that you can't hide that stuff from God and sooner or later you won't be able to hide it from others. It will express itself in one way or another. The hidden evil in the human heart.

Mark 7:20-23 *"It is what comes from inside that defiles you. For from within, out of a person's heart, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, wickedness, deceit, lustful desires, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these vile things come from within; they are what defile you."*

You might be sitting here this morning thinking that you are basically a good person and those who know you may think the same, but what is your heart really like?

What are the attitudes, thoughts and motives that only you and God know.

Do you know what God says about the human heart? Jeremiah 17:6 *“The human heart is the most deceitful of all things, and desperately corrupt. Who really knows how bad it is? But I, the LORD, search all hearts and examine secret motives.”*

Do you know what God says about our apparently good deeds that come from our deceitful, proud self-righteous hearts – filthy rags.

Our secular culture judges people by what they do or say, but Jesus saw right into the hearts of people and judged them by what they were thinking and what was motivating them. In fact Jesus spoke out more strongly against peoples internal attitudes than He did about eternal actions. The woman caught in adultery compared to the hardened, proud, hypocritical attitudes of the religious leaders.

Our humanistic culture believes that if people can simply change their external behaviour, they will be reformed, rehabilitated, so we have programs running in our secular institutions that are aimed at correcting and changing people's behaviour. But it's not working because the majority keep reverting to their old behaviour.

Ill. 18 months ago Andrew Little, minister of Justice said that 60% of prisoners reoffend within 2 years of being released from prison. This shows that for the last 30 years our criminal justice policy has failed. If the situation continues as it is, we will have to build a new prison every 2 to 3 years. We have to find a new approach. We have heard that so many times.

III. Some years ago Teen Challenge, based in Texas USA was working with drug addicts using a Christian based rehabilitation program. They had an 80% success rate and so they offered their program to the government drug rehabilitation agency which was only getting a 4% success rate. The government agency rejected the program because it was Christian. The same thing happened with Charles Colson's Program for prisoners.

What made these Christian programmes successful?

You can't change a person's behaviour until their heart is changed and only Jesus Christ by the power of His Holy Spirit can do that.

It is not rehabilitation, reformation or behaviour modification that we need – it is internal transformation and we, by our own efforts or programmes cannot do that. Holy Spirit.

We need to recognise that our hearts and minds are basically corrupt, deceitful, proud, selfish, and rebellious and we need to come to Christ and cry out to Him for mercy, forgiveness, cleansing and for His transforming power to change our hearts.

Until we recognise the true condition of our hearts we will go on thinking we are good righteous people, we won't see our need to repent, we won't see our need for God's mercy, we will not see the need for a Saviour or a cross and God who knows us inside out will not allow us into His heavenly Kingdom.

So where am I heading in all of this? I believe there are people here who call themselves Christians, who have been judging themselves by human standards based on external behaviour, thinking they are basically, good, upright people,

but like the religious leaders in Jesus day, their hearts are filthy, polluted, full of pride, resentment, greed, deceit, lust, envy, slander, self-righteousness, critical and judgemental attitudes, unbelief, bitterness, prejudice, envy, hypocrisy, idolatry, unforgiveness.

And although they try to hide it from others, it keeps leaking out mostly in what they say and in their attitudes.

As we come to the Lords table this morning I repeat the words of Paul in this passage. "A person ought to examine themselves before they eat the bread and drink the cup."

Pray the prayer of David ""Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. Point out anything in me that offends you."

And as God shows you your heart this morning, I would urge you to cry out to Him for mercy, forgiveness and cleansing from everything that is corrupting and polluting your heart and ask Him to transform your heart by the power of the Holy Spirit. When God does that you will never be the same again.

You will hate all those stinking, unloving, ungodly attitudes and motives that pollute your heart and reject them whenever they try to enter again and you will have a powerful motivation to do, think and say only what honours God and blesses others and you will have a new supernatural power to carry it out.

You will never think you are better than anyone else, you will never think that you have the right to criticise and judge others or withhold forgiveness. "I am an unworthy sinner saved only by the grace of God."

This is what the Bible calls being born again, given a new heart that hates evil and loves God and all He stands for.

Some of you have never had that experience, even though you may have been in church for years. No human being can create that experience – it is the work of the Holy Spirit. And when it happens you will know it without a doubt.

If I am speaking about you this morning, then I urge you to seek God, cry out to Him until He comes by His Spirit and does this work in your heart.

Create in me a clean heart