

Note: This is the sermon manuscript that Ben carried into the pulpit. Feel free to use it in any way to advance the kingdom of God.

Celebrating the Lord's Supper
1 Cor. 11:17-34
Englewood Baptist Church
Sunday morning, March 28, 2010

Please open your Bible to 1 Cor. 11.

For the past few weeks, we have been studying the subject of salvation. What does it mean to be "born again." Today, we celebrate the Lord's Supper, a special activity for all born again believers.

I don't know about you, but I love pictures. That's the main reason I do Facebook; I like to look at people's pictures. When I purchase a brand new toy for my child, I am so thankful that they include pictures. That's the only way that I can put it together. Assembly is so much more pleasant when I can look at the side of the box at the little girl standing in front of her kitchen set.

Human beings are visual creatures. We like to see it for ourselves. This is one of the reasons why Jesus commanded that two vivid illustrations remain in the church until he returns visibly and physically. Number one: baptism. When a person is saved, they should be plunged under water as a picture of their death. They should be raised from the water as a picture of the resurrection. So we baptize people as Jesus told us to.

Number two: the Lord's Supper. Jesus compared his body to a piece of bread. He referred to himself as the bread of life. He referred to his blood as the cup of the new covenant. The body and blood of Christ were sacrificed so that you can be born again. The grave is not the end for those who have partaken of the bread of life: Jesus Christ.

Now, before we study a passage of Scripture pertaining to the Lord's Supper, I want to address two dangers in the church concerning the elements. Don't fall into these two traps.

Two Traps Concerning the Supper

1. Superstition. That piece of bread is not a magical charm. We are not saved by eating Spirit-filled bread. We are not saved by drinking juice from a cup as if it were some magic potion. We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. So don't think that you can just drive to a building with a steeple, sip the cup and eat the cracker, and rest assured that you have been born again. Salvation is a supernatural surgery that takes place in a person's heart at the moment they surrender to Jesus. This worship celebration called Communion is designed for those who want to thank God anew for the body and blood that was spilled on Calvary's hill. The power is in the sacrifice, not in the elements themselves. Let's not become superstitious.

2. Legalism. We don't want to become legalistic with the Lord's Supper and act like robots mechanically going through an empty exercise. Legalism is lethal. What does legalism look like? Legalism looks like the guy who stands in Kroger on Feb. 13th and picks the card for his wife that says, "For my daughter on Valentines Day." It's the only one left. He takes a Sharpie Marker, crosses out the word Daughter, and replaces it with the word, "Woman." For my woman on Valentine's Day. The card is a good idea, but his heart is clearly not in the action. In the same way, we as Christians can approach the Lord's Supper with a legalistic heart that is cold toward God, but comforted by religious code and formality. We have done what we're supposed to do. We can check the Lord's Supper off the list. No, this is supposed to be sobering and special.

Today is Palm Sunday, the day when Jesus began his journey into Jerusalem, on a donkey. He rode to his execution with you and I in mind. Let's not run through this week picking up Easter eggs and forgetting about the cross. The Supper is special because of what it stands for.

Now, having said that, I would like to draw your eyes to the text for today. In this passage, Paul is addressing the Corinthian church who is making some serious mistakes with the Lord's Supper.

Read with me, 1 Cor. 11:17-22.

Paul begins by addressing the perversion of the Supper. In the day of his writing, the Corinthians had developed a special meal called a love feast that was concluded with the taking of Communion. The purpose of this love feast was to foster fellowship among believers and mutual sharing and caring. The emphasis was on the unity of the body. Just as we celebrate holidays by getting the entire family together and eating a big meal, the Corinthian church had made a point to gather together, eat a feast, and then take Communion. This was a wonderful custom that had become worthy of condemnation.

What was the problem?

- There were factions among the people. (v.18) One of the most discouraging things that can happen in any church is infighting. Jesus said that the gates of hell cannot prevail against his church. He implied that the body of Christ is a mighty force to reckon with. How sad it is then, that some churches choose to spend their energy nitpicking, arguing, and producing small parties of people that members join. "I like this preacher, I like that preacher; I like this music, I like that music; I like these programs, I like those programs." When the church chooses to start small parties of people with an agenda, momentum is stopped and harmony is lost. I liken this to a choir. When a choir is rehearsed and paying attention to the leader, they sound beautiful and they bless many. However, when they all choose to sing their own way and their own tempo, they bring pain to the ears of their listeners. They are only a blessing when they are "together." The Corinthian church was not "together" when they took the Lord's Supper. They had lost their harmony; they lost sight of what the Supper was intended for.

Now, let's examine the specific issue in that church. Vv.20-21 shed some light on this...

There was a social divide among the believers. Those who were wealthy brought a full stash of food and selfishly ate before the poorer members got there. This way, they could throw down 2 pieces of dessert and not feel guilty when others received none. Let me say it to you plainly: they didn't want to share in their potluck supper. It was "every man for himself." And that is not the battle cry of the body of Christ. The church is called to be "ONE." Look what Jesus prayed in John 17:

*I'm praying not only for them
But also for those who will believe in me
Because of them and their witness about me.
The goal is for all of them to become one heart and mind—
Just as you, Father, are in me and I in you,
So they might be one heart and mind with us. John 17:20-23 The Message*

The heart of Jesus' prayer for the church was unity—one heart and mind. How do we practice that? As we prepare for Easter Sunday, I want us to consider how we can become more unified as a church.

How do we foster unity in the church? I think it's similar to the way that families grow close.

1. By spending time together. (Acts 2:42)

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, Acts 2:42

The early believers invested time in on another. Families who rarely see one another are distant and disconnected. Jesus taught us the best model of discipleship was in spending heaps of time with a small group. He didn't rely solely on a weekly meeting with donuts, either. There was time all throughout the week shared together. This is why our Sunday School program is so vital to the health of this church. We have a weekly meeting, yes, but the goal of Sunday School is to foster true friendships and life sharing. If we want to the Lord's Supper table to mean anything, we have to get to know others. Nobody likes to eat with strangers. Are you eating with strangers today?

2. By ministering to one another. (Gal. 5: 13-14)

...serve one another in love.¹⁴ The entire law is summed up in a single command: "Love your neighbor as yourself. Gal. 5:13-14

By this, I mean meeting one another's needs. When a person in your small group shares that their car broke down this week, the natural reaction of believers is this: how can we help this brother out? Does he need to borrow my car? Does he need a ride to work? Does he need a mechanic? What can I do to meet this brother's need? When the church is truly seeking to minister to one another, we spend a lot less time debating service times and schedules and trivial

things like that. We build one another up through met needs. Are you meeting the needs of anyone in this church? Or is it, “every man for himself”?

3. By ministering together. (1 Cor. 12:14-20)

First Corinthians refers to the church as a body with many parts. The hand needs the foot, the eye needs the nose. One of the most unifying moments for an eye is when he is forced spend a week with a nose. It’s a beautiful thing when people serve the Lord in partnership. I think about the mission trip I went on in Brazil. I was on a team of evangelism, others were washing feet, others were giving out eye glasses to people who couldn’t see, others were working with children. It was a well-oiled machine. When believers work together like this it has a unifying effect.

Have you ever formed an impression about somebody that was untrue? Maybe you assumed a person was arrogant because of the way they walked? Or you assumed a person was worldly because they drove a nicer model car. Or you assumed a person was rude because they “blew you off” one time in Wal-Mart. And then, something strange happened? One Sunday, The Lord put the two of you together in the preschool classroom and to your horror, 16 kids show up in your class. Suddenly, a friendship is forged for the sake of survival. Missions unites. When a church is truly mission-oriented, when Sunday School classes are outreach driven, when a pastor stays committed to preach the gospel to the lost, the church will grow and unity will be fostered. When we stop serving the Lord together, we dry up. We must remain outreach driven.

- Invest and Invite Cards.
- The small Bibles
- Meet ME at 5 PM in the WFH to be a part of canvassing 20 neighborhoods with Invitation cards.

4. By practicing true forgiveness. (Col. 3:13)

Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Col 3:13

Has someone in this church injured you emotionally? Has someone hurt your feelings? In the name of Jesus, get over it. Move on. Don’t keep a record of wrongs, but wipe the slate clean. As one of my friends told me recently, “you should let him off the hook.” What a novel idea. I don’t want people to hold a bad day against me. I shouldn’t hold on to the past failures of others either. We grow closer when we forgive one another.

5. By praying together and for one another. (Acts 1:14)

They all joined together constantly in prayer... Acts 1:14

There are thousand things that we can do together. We can eat together, play together, shop together, fish together, travel together, even read things together. However, there is one activity under heaven that the Devil snarls at. He hates to see brothers and sisters praying together. I

could list a thousand verses on the power of prayer, both Old Testament and New. But heaven meets earth every time you stop to pray. Not only that, but Jesus told us that whenever 2 or 3 gather together and agree, he is most certainly in our midst. I have come to realize this as a pastor with the staff.

Earlier this year, the Lord led me to change our staff meeting to staff worship. Rather than spending the entire meeting time staring at papers and absorbing new information, we now begin with a share time. I ask three staff members to share two victories and two pains in their ministries, and then we pray for those team members out loud. I think that they would all tell you that this shift to a more prayer focused time has breathed fresh wind into the meeting.

In the same way, when Sunday School classes and small groups decide to hit pause on the eating, pause on the visiting, and hit play on the prayer button, something heavenly takes place and intimacy starts to develop. We need to be praying together.

6. By building one another up with words. (Heb. 3:13)

¹³ But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. Heb. 3:13

Have you ever realized the power of an encouraging word? I don't think that you and realize how much we need that. On paper, all we need to grow is food and water, but I would say that a Christian will rarely grow without a steady supply of encouragement. Like a little plant placed in the desert, a person cannot survive without people pouring courage into them.

You probably haven't thought about it this way, but the human heart responds to encouragement like a balloon responds to helium. Every time you breathe a positive word into someone's life, you lift them up. You strengthen their walk. Every time you criticize, you bring them down. If you don't believe me on this, just perform an experiment on your children. Tell your son that he's great at something and watch what happens to his eyes.

Miles playing basketball illustration.

Healthy churches encourage one another daily. Are you an encouraging person?

7. By showing caution when judging others.

For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you. Matthew 7:2

Now this verse is not talking about Christian accountability. Holding each other accountable to a lifestyle of holiness is a good and godly thing. Christians need others to keep them on the straight and narrow and loving confrontation is a part of every healthy family. There are no families without conflict, and there are no churches without conflict. So Jesus isn't saying that we should sweep sin under the rug and never call it out. What Jesus is talking about here is the

throne perching. Whenever you sit up on the high seat and question the personal decisions of others, you begin to play the part of Pharisee.

Other church members aren't going to parent their kids the way you parent your kids. You don't have to agree with every decision your friends make with their son, but it's not your job to be the judge either. They will give an account to the Lord for the way they handled their children.

Other church members aren't going to spend their money the way you spend yours. Now you might think that your way is the best way, and it may be, but it's not your job to determine the budget in another person's household.

Other church members aren't going to spend their time the way you spend your time. You might have an opinion about that. You might think others waste away their time, or they invest it in silly things, but you are not the judge.

Other church members aren't going to find value in everything you see as treasure. One member of this church loves to attend antique shows, another member finds joy in fancy car shows. Is one better than the other? Don't look down on people when they see your treasures as junk, and vice versa.

What I'm trying to say here is this: let's not be afraid to confront clear sin when we sit it in others. However, let's give each other the benefit of the doubt on the nonessential matters. Jesus said it was his job to change people. It's our job to love them and to accept them.

Healthy churches accept one another.