

1 CORINTHIANS 11:27-32

JUDGEMENT DAY

“Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.”¹

“**W**e must all appear before the judgement seat of Christ” [2 CORINTHIANS 5:10]. This knowledge serves to restrain many of God’s people from pursuing evil. Christians live with the knowledge that they will face a divine review of the conduct of their lives. They know that there is a day in which they will stand as open books before the Judgement Seat of Christ. This is not a judgement to determine if the Christian is saved or lost; it is a judgement of the conduct of their lives since believing. However, Christians even now face judgement on an ongoing basis.

Those who preach the Word are judged on an ongoing basis by the Lord; and they know that they are subject to greater scrutiny as their ministry is reviewed. Our conduct as Christians is judged by the world who watches to see how we conduct our lives. How many people are turned from considering the Faith by wickedness in the lives of professed saints of the Most High God? We are responsible to be discerning about the way fellow Christians live, holding one another accountable before the Lord. In our text, the Apostle instructs those participating at the Lord’s Table to judge themselves, or face judgement by the Lord Himself.

AN INVITATION TO JUDGE OURSELVES — The text presents an invitation to judgement. Either we will judge ourselves whenever we approach the Lord’s Table, or we are informed that the Lord Himself will judge us. We are urged, therefore, to engage in self-judgement before we partake of the Meal. The criterion for self-judgement is our view of the Lord’s Table. The basis for self-judgement is our attitude towards worshipping the Lord Jesus. The purpose for self-judgement is to ensure that we worship according to the will of the Lord. Each of these points is vital, demanding that as Christians we understand what we are doing.

The Criterion for Self-Judgement is Our Understanding of the Lord’s Table. Do we observe a magical rite? Does participating in the Meal make an individual holy or somehow more acceptable to God? Do we come before the Lord only to be judged on how perfectly we perform the ritual? If we heed the teaching of much of Christendom and agree with the attitude of the most of those who participate at one time of another, the Meal is magical, a means to make us acceptable before the Lord, and we must therefore perform the ritual precisely.

However, neither in the institution of the Meal nor in the prescriptions for conduct of the Meal are there found such sentiments. When He instituted the Meal the Master “took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, ‘Take, eat; this is My body’” [MATTHEW 26:26]. Had He offered His arm and said, “Bite Me,” the disciples would have been repulsed. However, they understood that the bread He broke was symbolic.

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Had they any doubts concerning the fact that drinking from the cup was symbolic participation in the blood of the Master, they would have surrendered any such doubts when He took the cup and gave thanks before offering it to them. He said, “Drink of it, all of you, for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins”

[MATTHEW 26:28]. Jesus stated that He offered juice and not blood—the same juice they had just drunk at the Passover celebration; and even had there been misunderstanding concerning what was offered, that misunderstanding would have been cleared up when the Lord Jesus added, “I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s Kingdom” [MATTHEW 26:29].

During previous messages I have stressed my belief that the majority of evangelical Christians have transformed the Meal until it is difficult to recognise what it was meant to be. The Meal is now a Christian ordinance rather than a church ordinance. No longer is the Meal strictly a congregational act of worship, subject to the oversight of the church, but it is now a sacrament subject to the desire of the participants. This transformation of the Meal is in keeping with the stress on democratic decision-making among the churches, rather than consensus after prayer and appeal to the Word of God. In other words, modern Christians will loudly demand their rights, even at the Lord’s Table, rather than humbly submit to the Lord of the church.

The overwhelming sentiment of modern evangelicalism is that the rite is a private act of worship which may only incidentally be shared with other worshippers. The presence or absence of other Christians is secondary to what individual worshippers seek and feel. In keeping with this novel view, parents will decide when and whether their children, including infant children, partake of the Meal. In fact, modern parents take umbrage should the officiants speak against the practise of giving the elements to unbaptised children.

Despite how people feel about the Meal, and disregarding the poor, or even absent, instruction concerning the Meal from contemporary pulpits, we are challenged to adopt a biblical view of the Lord’s Table. Paul teaches the Corinthian Christians that believers make three confessions as they participate at the Meal. They confess thanksgiving to the Lord for salvation. The Meal is for those who know Christ Jesus as Lord. He makes the point that “as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death” [1 CORINTHIANS 11:26]. Indeed, we participate in remembrance of the Master’s sacrifice. The bread reminds the believer that His body was given for His people, and the juice reminds participants that His blood was poured out on behalf of His people.

The Meal provides opportunity to confess fellowship, both with the Lord and with the church which exercises oversight over the Meal. Paul reminds the Corinthians that it is when they “come together as a church” [1 CORINTHIANS 11:18] that they observe the Meal; it is in assembly. Earlier, he had stressed that participating in the Meal was a participation in the blood and the body of Christ [see 1 CORINTHIANS 10:16, 17]. He drives this point home when he writes, “Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread” [1 CORINTHIANS 10:17]. In the Communion Meal, we show fellowship in regard to redemption and to the very life of Christ. The Meal is not for confession of sin, but for confession of fellowship.

The worshipper confesses through participating at the Lord’s Table that he or she is living in anticipation of the Lord’s return, for the churches are to continue observing the Lord’s Table until the Master returns [1 CORINTHIANS 11:26]. In effect, the Lord’s Supper is a means for renewing courage and/or hope because the worshipper lifts his or her heart to recall the promise Jesus gave His disciples: “If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also” [JOHN 14:3].

Self-Judgement Exposes Our Attitude Concerning Worship of the Lord Jesus. Throughout the instruction Paul has provided the Corinthian Christians is ongoing rebuke of self-centred Christianity. Too many of the church members came to the Table to fill their bellies and to get drunk, whether other members of the congregation had anything to eat or whether they were destitute. Participants were focused on their own comfort rather than on the welfare of others. Such attitudes displayed an appalling lack of recognition of the Lord's presence.

As we have seen in previous studies, in the ancient church, the Lord's Supper appears to have been observed following what was known as the Agape, or Love Feast. This was much like what we speak of as a potluck meal. Following the service of instruction, Apostolic Christians gathered to fellowship around a shared meal, at the conclusion of which they observed the Communion Meal. Their actions at the Agape reflected their prevailing focus on their own interests—a focus that occupied much of the Apostle's concern expressed in this letter.

Paul had begun the letter by noting the development of factions within the congregation, with some following Paul, some following Apollos, some following Peter, and some super pious saints declaring that they followed Christ [see 1 CORINTHIANS 1:10-17]. The divisions within the congregation were so great that the witness of the church within pagan society was threatened [see 1 CORINTHIANS 3:1 FF.]. In fact, the factions paralysed the congregation, causing inability to perform difficult tasks when such were called for [see 1 CORINTHIANS 5:1-13]. They were even insisting on their rights to the point of filing lawsuits against one another [see 1 CORINTHIANS 6:1-8]. The self-life led increasing numbers of them to flaunt the freedom they enjoyed in Christ without thought of the impact of their lives on fellow believers [see 1 CORINTHIANS 8:1-10:33]. Yet other members of the congregation were ignoring courtesy and common morality by dressing and acting without regard for the impact of their actions on others [see 1 CORINTHIANS 11:1-16].

Are you surprised when I say that a congregation in which many, if not the most, of the membership is focused on what makes them feel good is incapable of pleasing God? Regardless of however much they would have protested that they were actually worshipping, the Corinthians were unable to know the full blessings of God. Consequently, God had already begun to remove some of the most egregious offenders—some through illness and some through death. It was discipline of the most extreme sort because these individuals, while claiming to worship the Risen Saviour, were actually promoting their own interests. The Corinthian church was no longer functioning as the Body of Christ; it was just another religious society—fundamentally undifferentiated from the pagan religious societies about them.

God appoints us as members of one body, and we are expected to build one another in the Faith. If we cannot worship together, joining our hearts as one, we will not build one another. Christians who do not build one another will not comfort one another or encourage one another. Building one another in the Faith, mutual encouragement and comfort for fellow worshippers necessarily result when the people of God function as God intended [cf. 1 CORINTHIANS 14:3]. When members of the congregation focus on how they feel as individuals—and even on how they feel as families—rather than focusing on how to fulfil their ministry as members of the Body of Christ, the result is at best a dysfunctional church, and at worst a congregation that destroys the testimony of Christ in the community.

The Purpose for Self-Judgement is to Correct Errant Attitudes. The criteria by which we are to judge ourselves are the truths Christ has declared concerning the Meal. Approaching the Table, we are to judge our attitude toward worship, for that attitude reflects our view of the Lord. We must be thorough, probing deeply to discover hidden motives that lurk in the dark reaches of our mind, ruthlessly ridding ourselves of all known contamination.

The purpose for judging ourselves before partaking of the Meal is often misunderstood. Some people imagine that judgement is a means for exclusion from the Meal. However, self-judgement is actually meant to prepare us for worship. Judgement presents the opportunity for us to bring our minds into conformity with the mind of the Lord. Judgement provides us opportunity to fine-tune our hearts so that our actions honour Him Whom we worship.

Christ calls us to worship; but worship will never occur if our attitude is wrong. Therefore, God calls us to confront errant attitudes, bringing our will into conformity with His perfect will and submitting our attitudes to control of His Spirit. We are to discern the body and blood of the Lord when we eat and drink. We are to recognise the Lord's Body. In no small measure this means that we are responsible to recognise our fellow worshippers, giving thanks for the work that God has done in their lives even as He has knit us together as one Body.

Before partaking of the Meal, I urge each member participating to take time to give thanks for the Body to which God has joined us. I encourage you to review what God has done in our midst and what He is even now doing here. As we reflect on His gracious work, we will undoubtedly find a new appreciation of the people God has brought into the fellowship, praising Him for the strengths each one presents and asking that He bless each one to perform their assigned tasks. We do this as part of the judging process, which in turn stimulates us to confess joyfully God's goodness in giving others to the Body for our mutual benefit.

Then, we turn again to the work of examining ourselves. Judging ourselves, we must dismiss any thought of privilege at the Lord's Table. We are not here because we are superior to others; we must not allow ourselves to look down on any other because we deem them in some way inferior to ourselves. We must banish from our minds every thought of merit. We do not come before the Lord because we have a right to His Table; we come because He invites us and graciously provides the means by which we may come. This may be the most difficult task because we have been trained for so long to imagine that we have a right to the Table. We may not demand Christ's acceptance; but, with humility, we acknowledge His gracious acceptance.

It is significant that Paul says we are to judge *ourselves*. It is not the place of the church to judge others, though we must hold those who are under discipline accountable. Likewise, if we are aware of a problem in the life of another, should we not be sufficiently concerned to approach that one, inviting him or her to explain the problem, making correction if such is required? It is an act of love to assume responsibility to approach those whom we believe in need of reproach. It is a selfish act to mutter and silently censure others rather than accepting responsibility to show our love through addressing them privately. Surely, the Word of the Saviour applies in this instance. He said, "If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift" [MATTHEW 5:23, 24]. Each member of the Body is responsible before the Lord to examine his or her heart before partaking of the bread and the juice to ensure that the heart is properly prepared to worship.

AN ALTERNATIVE WARNING OF DIVINE JUDGEMENT — If we do not judge ourselves before approaching the Lord's Table, the Master Himself will judge us. It is possible that some people come to the Table in ignorance—they are untaught and unaware of what the Bible teaches. Tragically, many Christians are untaught concerning the Lord's Table. Pastors have often failed to provide instruction or they fear rebuking the disobedient. Many Christians have observed the ritual as a performance so often that they do not think about what is being done. Since everyone does it the same way, that way must be right. Why question what has always been done?

However, Paul appears genuinely alarmed when he warns the Corinthians that, “Anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgement on himself.” The Corinthians had within the congregation a number of people that did not recognise the Body of the Lord. They demonstrated this ignorance through their failure to show respect toward or consideration of their fellow worshippers. Consequently, they exposed themselves to divine judgement. Moreover, God’s judgement had even proceeded to the point of death for some. One can only wonder whether we know people who have received discipline as result of their wilful disregard of the Body of Christ. I rather suspect that such may indeed be the case!

A good reason to question what has always been done is that we know what is written. None of us can plead ignorance if we have read the Word and if we have attended the teaching of the Word. We cannot deny responsibility if we know what is written. Therefore, there is no excuse for ignorance, if we listen to the preaching of the Word or if we actually read the Word. To become knowledgeable does demand that we overcome the inertia that accompanies going with the flow in order to avoid making waves. Fulfilling the will of God demands that we boldly reject the commendation of mere mortals in order to gain the Lord’s approval.

One good reason to question doing what has always been done is the Apostolic warning, “If we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged.” Though God does judge the presumptuous saint, do not imagine that all illness is the result of divine judgement—it is not. Some among the saints are ill or weakened as result of past sin; though forgiven, the consequences of sin often continue throughout this life. There are among the people of God some who bear the scars of past injuries resulting from sinful actions or weakness that lingers as result of catastrophic injuries or illness because of sinful choices in years past.

It is also accurate to note that some believers experience sickness or experience loss as result of satanic assault. For His own reasons, God does on occasion surrender His beloved child to the evil one. Such times are undoubtedly painful for the Christian, but God acts for His glory and for our good in permitting such things to happen. Should you be one permitted by God to pass through such times, you may be assured that the testing you are called to endure will ultimately work to the praise of His glory. We are always assured that we have a Father who is too wise to make a mistake, and who is too good to hurt us needlessly.

It is always possible that illness or pain is part of the common experience of all mankind. Our fallen condition exposes us to the same illnesses and injuries that assail all people; we are not protected from the common hurts experienced by all people. In such cases, we must act wisely, caring for our bodies and seeking out medical help which God has provided.

However, when we act presumptuously—asserting our rights rather than humbly accepting God’s grace, or ignoring the Body as we focus on our own interests, or imagining that we deserve to be blessed—if we are God’s child, we may well face His judgement. A review of the Word of God reveals God’s methodology in discipline. That God disciplines His own children is immediately evident from the Apostle’s own words, “When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.” This view accords quite well with the instruction of the author of the Letter to Hebrew Christians. “Have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons?

““My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord,
nor be weary when reproved by him.

For the Lord disciplines the one he loves,
and chastises every son whom he receives.’

“It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” [HEBREWS 12:5-11].

A review of the Word of God teaches that God progressively increases pressure to gain the attention of His disobedient child. When the child of God walks contrary to the will of the Lord, the Lord buffets the soul, creating internal resistance. While speaking of God’s judgements on false teachers, Peter makes the following assertion. “If by turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to ashes [God] condemned them to extinction, making them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if He rescued righteous Lot, greatly distressed by the sensual conduct of the wicked (for as that righteous man lived among them day after day, he was tormenting his righteous soul over their lawless deeds that he saw and heard); then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgement” [2 PETER 2:6-9].

In the midst of the assertion of God’s ability and willingness to judge unprincipled men, Peter notes that Lot was tormented in his soul. Just so, God’s people cannot acquiesce to sinful behaviour without experiencing torment in the soul. When we see the lives of godless, unprincipled individuals, if we agree with their actions through our silence, we are miserable. This is nothing less than God’s judgement, giving us no rest until we stand with the Lord.

Should that fail to gain our attention, the Word of God tells us that the Father is willing to remove what we value in order to gain our attention. When a man among the Corinthians was living promiscuously, Paul counselled the church to deliver the man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh [see 1 CORINTHIANS 5:3-5]. The man’s healthy body allowed him to live as he wished; therefore, he abused the freedom and mobility God had given. When divine protection given through participation in the life of the Body was removed, he suffered and again sought to bring his life into fellowship with the Lord and with His people. The congregation, swinging from one extreme to the other, was unwilling to forgive. So, the Apostle was compelled to intervene, counselling them to receive him into fellowship again [see 2 CORINTHIANS 2:5-8]. Just so, whenever things begin to assume a greater importance in our life than the Master, we may see those things we value most taken from us so that we will learn to esteem what is truly valuable.

If spiritual opposition that torments the soul and the loss of things of lesser worth than our relationship with Christ and His people fail to gain our attention, then God may just say, “Enough!” and call us home. This is what John speaks about as he draws his first letter to a close. “If anyone sees his brother committing a sin not leading to death, he shall ask, and God will give him life—to those who commit sins that do not lead to death. There is sin that leads to death; I do not say that one should pray for that. All wrongdoing is sin, but there is sin that does not lead to death” [1 JOHN 5:16, 17].

One can almost hear the horror in John’s voice as he speaks of sin that leads to death. Bear in mind that it is a “brother” who is witnessed committing this sin—it is not an unbeliever. John is warning us that believers may be called home because they will not heed the Spirit. Christians are subject to the Lord’s discipline, even to the point of removal from this life.

James writes something that is quite similar to what John has written concerning sin in the life of saints. “My brothers, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and someone brings him back, let him know that whoever brings back a sinner from his wandering will save his soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins” [JAMES 5:19, 20]. Again, notice that the one threatened with removal from this life was at one time counted among the believers and has now wandered off. Thus, there is urgency in James’ words as he admonishes believers to bring back the sinner from his wandering, for we will thus save his soul from death.

This is precisely the observation Paul makes concerning some Corinthians. He writes, “This is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died!” Disregard for the Body of Christ had contaminated the entire church. Failure to practise the life of the Body had resulted in sickness for many. More than a few experienced divine judgement in the form of sickness. And some had died! God would not tolerate the continued exaltation of self in the midst of His Body, for to do so would be tantamount to ignoring cancer in the Body of the Lord! Radical surgery was mandated in order to eradicate the threat to continued health for the Body. Yet, the Apostle was compelled to point out the obvious to these self-absorbed saints.

God loves us too much to permit us to destroy our lives or to drag His Name through the mud before the eyes of the world. He will hold us accountable, even taking us out of the situation we are no longer willing to handle. This is the action of a Father who loves us and will not desert us to our own proclivities toward sin.

DISCIPLINE AND CONDEMNATION CONTRASTED — God was not being cruel to the Corinthians. Nor should we imagine that He is mean or vindictive when He holds us accountable. Paul makes it clear that the Corinthians were facing discipline and not condemnation. He wrote, “When we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.” Two concepts vie for attention in this statement—discipline and condemnation.

Discipline is God’s work in the life of His child to disciple the child, creating the image of God’s own Son in the believer. Discipline, as we saw in the passage from Hebrews, is temporary—it is to be endured, knowing the outcome. Divine discipline has the goal of preparing us to “share His holiness” [see **HEBREWS 12:10b**]. When we are disciplined by the Lord, we anticipate the “peaceful fruit of righteousness” [**HEBREWS 12:11**].

The author of the Hebrews Letter continues by encouraging those to whom he writes, “Lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no ‘root of bitterness’ springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled; that no one is sexually immoral or unholy like Esau, who sold his birthright for a single meal” [**HEBREWS 12:12-16**].

It is as though he is reminding us that we may either take control of the discipleship process by doing what pleases the Master and shunning evil, or we may anticipate that He will assume oversight of the discipleship process for us. The former, though demanding, is far preferable to the latter. The message is the same as that which Paul delivered to the Corinthians.

Paul does say that when we are disciplined, it is so that we will not be condemned with the world. For all the problems associated with living in this present world, it can be pleasant. Consequently, we become attached to the world and we find that we delight in ease of life. However, we must not forget that this present world is “stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgement and destruction of the ungodly” [**2 PETER 3:7**].

We are told that those who have rejected the grace of God offered in Christ the Lord face “a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.” The author continues by writing, “Anyone who has set aside the Law of Moses dies without mercy on the evidence of two or three witnesses. How much worse punishment, do you think, will be deserved by the one who has spurned the Son of God, and has profaned the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and has outraged the Spirit of grace? For we know him who said, ‘Vengeance is mine; I will repay.’ And again, ‘The Lord will judge his people.’ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” [HEBREWS 10:27-31].

The world is doomed, and all that is in it is destined for dust. Those who have failed to avail themselves of the grace of God are even now condemned. This is the testimony of John, “Whoever believes in [the Christ] is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the Name of the Only Son of God” [JOHN 3:18]. John also writes, “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him” [JOHN 3:36].

So, when we are disciplined, God is making a distinction between us and those who are condemned. He is treating us as sons, delivering us from the wrath to come. This is a process that began when we believed the message of life and will continue until the Day of Christ. Jesus said, “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears My word and believes Him who sent Me has eternal life. He does not come into judgement, but has passed from death to life” [JOHN 5:24].

Have you known the discipline of the Lord? You have if you are His child. God asks, “What child is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which we all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons” [HEBREWS 12:7, 8]. Moreover, as His child, you are offered the opportunity to discipline yourself, beginning by recognising the Body of the Lord, treating His people with respect.

You see, the issue is not whether you can partake of Communion or whether you are excluded. The issue is whether you are focused on gratifying your own desires or whether you are intent on glorifying Christ the Lord through participating in the life of His Body. This is the reason we issue a call to all who will receive the message of life to believe. This is the Word of the Lord to all who hear this day. “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.”

We need but believe the message that Christ Jesus died because of our sin and was raised for our justification. We need but look to Him—Risen and seated on His heavenly throne—asking that He receive us, for we are promised that “Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved” [ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13].

I pray that you have called on the Name of the Lord. I do pray that you have received Him as Master of life. I do pray that you are walking in obedience to Him. And I do pray that you have seized the opportunity to disciple your life, bringing it under the rule of the Spirit of God for His glory and for your good. Amen.