

Title: In your heart or In your face

Text: 1 Cor. 11.23-34

Theme: The terrifying command of communion

Series: 1 Corinthians #50

Prop Stmt God demands obedience from the heart observing the Lord's Table forces us to face it.

Next Sunday we will be observing communion in the AM service. Since we are in this passage anyway, I am going to save verses 23-26 for next week and preach two shorter sermons then on those verses, one before we observe the bread, and the other before we observe the cup. But, today, I would like to draw your attention to two things about verses 23-26 that I will develop more fully next week. First of all, these verses deal with what we are supposed to be doing. The observation of the Lord's Table, or Lord's Supper is serious business. Verses 23-26 says, you have to do this because the Lord of the church established this! But, verses 27-33 says, you have to do it right. You have to do it, but, you have to do it the way Christ established it, which is why verses 27-33 are a serious warning.

The second thing I want you to observe is that this is from the Lord himself. This is true about all of Scripture. God's Word has authority because it is from God. When you are told to do something, or someone is trying to persuade you to change your mind, you ask questions such as – "Who says?" Are they believable? Do they have an agenda? When God says, that's it! And God has said. His Word is what He has said. That is why that if we disbelieve or disobey the Bible, we are disbelieving and disobeying God Himself. To disbelieve God means that you have found a greater authority than God. You have found someone (presumably yourself or Satan or a tool of them) who is more trustworthy, more true, and therefore, has greater believability. To disobey God, means that you have found someone who is smarter, wiser, and more capable of directing your life. When you look at it in those terms, you begin to see at least theoretically why it is total absurdity to disbelieve and disobey God.

Of course there is no one who is more believable or more capable than God. God knows that about Himself. Therefore, His commands to love Him with all of your heart, soul and mind, to worship Him only, to follow Him completely and to obey Him sincerely are not commands from an ego-maniac who demands unquestioned obedience like the Wizard of Oz because He has something to hide and is trying to keep you away at a safe distance where He can use you and exploit you for evil purposes. God knows that for you to accept any other authority or director in your life would be for you to accept someone who is inferior and incapable of directing you as you need. His commands are driven by His love for you, because He alone has your true best interest at heart. Your best interest is to honor Him through a faith-driven love, worship and obedience. Your worst interest is to come up with your own version of life and to be your own authority.

There is a connection between verse 23 "For I received from the Lord" and verse 27 – "Therefore". The command to be followed "do this", brings with it a warning for those who do this, but in so doing abuse it and misuse it. So, on the one hand, we have to

observe communion. If you are a follower of Christ, you are commanded by God to participate in this. But, as we observe it we have to recognize that this is an extremely serious activity of the church body. These verses are full of warning. If you are attempting to live your life somewhere in between full devotion to God and complete domination by Satan, i.e. you want about \$3 worth of God, a Christianity that brings you a measure of respect, but that allows you in your mind to maintain your own private sins, communion to you is like tear gas. This ordinance smokes you out. If Christ is not fully in your heart, and you are using the church as a cover for that, communion rightfully understood ought to scare you to death. You can sit here, Sunday after Sunday, and no one really knows, perhaps other than a few family members how you really live. And you can convince yourself that since life hasn't completely caved in, that God is...well, maybe a bit distracted from your situation. But, communion makes you really uncomfortable, because while the sermon that I preach may seem as if it is a safe distance from you, the bread and the cup are all of a sudden – right in your face. If, what they represent is not fully embraced by your heart, you are getting squeezed.

Now, before I launch into this, you need to be prepared for this text and be ready to receive what it is saying. This is a heavy passage. And I do not think that we do very well with serious stuff these days. In OT Israel the high priest would go into the holy of holies once a year to offer a bowl of blood from a goat as a sacrifice that would cover the sins of the nation for a year. (Lev.16) Before he did that, he would have to enter into the holy of holies with the blood of a bull that was offered as a sacrifice for his own sins. As he went into the holy of holies he had to burn incense so that the smoke from the incense would conceal the atonement cover above the Testimony so that he would not die. The high priest was the only man who could stand before the very presence of Almighty God, and even the high priest could only do it, once a year, and then with the blood of a bull, incense that would function as a screen and then the blood of a goat. These sacrifices were a matter of life and death. This, was holy, sacred, and awesome in the truest sense of those words. The Shekinah Glory Cloud of God was there. This was no time for laughing and dancing, and making jokes. There is a time for that, but this wasn't. A rope would be tied around the ankle of the high priest in case God killed him because there was something unclean about the high priest and the rope would enable others to pull his body out of the holy of holies. You mean God would do that? Yes!

Today, I doubt that many people are even remotely able to appreciate the concept of holy, sacred and awesome. Our culture is so profane, so vulgar, and so common that there is nothing that is sacred anymore. Now think with me for a minute. Why is it that God said (2nd commandment) – NO IMAGES, NO IDOLS!! No, image can do Him justice. No image can accurately reflect Him. You will get used to an image sitting around your family room. You can take an image and stick it in a box, or if it is small enough put it into your pocket. Today, we take so many pictures. Pictures can be good, but they can also be disastrous. Pictures are everywhere, especially in places where they should not be. The result is, the most private parts of life are now being viewed by the public. We are so used to 24-7 TV, news cameras, you tube, my space, and videos and pictures of people's most private moments, that there is nothing that is private anymore. We are a nation, a world of voyeurs. Tabloid journalism and our desire to publicly talk about

private things has left us with nothing private. There is nothing sacred anymore. It is like the couple who are sexually involved before marriage, think nothing of it, and then wonder, what is the big deal about marriage? They do not understand what is sacred because they have taken that which is sacred and have made it common. Nothing is holy, because we have shed all of our decency for a camera. Can you imagine what would happen if the high priest took his camera with him into the holy of holies and attempted to take a picture of God? The fact that we have lost our inhibitions about so much reveals how ignorant we are about life. We have traded away our ability to understand and appreciate the One who is truly holy, because we have lost that category in our minds. The church is singing more about the holiness of God now than it has in the last 50 years, and I am convinced that it understands it less than ever. So, I am trying to warn you about a serious matter for the church yet recognizing that some of you need to ask God to help you construct a category for serious and awesome things in your own life and begin to realize that there are many things that are truly sacred, and not to be treated as if they are vulgar or common. I want to connect one more dot to the picture while I am at it.

The character of God is like a spectrum. All of His attributes work in a perfect harmonious completeness. The more we understand His holiness, the more we are able to appreciate His grace. If you minimize His holiness, you minimize His grace. In a sense, it is like the person who is depressed and goes to the doctor for an anti-depressant. The pill may work to eliminate the bottom rungs of the ladder so the person does not get too sad, but in so doing it cuts off the top three rungs of the ladder so the person cannot laugh and experience deep joy either. When you cut the rungs off of either end of the ladder, your emotions do not go very far and life loses color. Everything turns into a dull and vague gray. For some of you – that is Christianity. I am telling you that the very One whom you are afraid of, is the only One who can help you really, really live. That is why we can tremble before this God as we consider His burning righteousness and then from our toenails sing about the goodness of God with absolute joy. In churches today, it is common to hear about the worship wars that are taking place over a number of issues, some of which is musical style. Frankly, I really don't care that much about style. The issue is so much deeper. But, when a church is not personally encountering God through His Word and Spirit, then we are so tempted to rely upon a feeling, a style, a sound to try to fill in its place.

Observing the Lord's Supper is not a sentimental time for the church to feel spiritual or to go through a ceremony that simply gives people a quasi unifying religious experience. This is a very important time for the church because as we see from v.27...

1. **Communion reflects your salvation!**

“Therefore” – in light of what communion is about, if any person participates in an unworthy manner, he or she is inviting serious judgment upon his life. Jesus launched communion. He inaugurated it for the church. He told his disciples in Luke 22.15 that he had fervently anticipated this event. We now realize that his entire 33 year mission on the earth was coming to completion and communion was capturing this. Does the life and death of Christ mean anything to us? Of course!! It is our life! The life and death of

Christ is our only hope because Christ lived the life that I could not live and lived it in my place. My sin, your sin has to be punished. God could not pour out his love upon us and receive us unto Himself while we are contaminated and polluted and defiled by our sin. Something had to be done about our sin – So, God sent Christ to live and then die in our place. His violent, substitutionary, perfect, God-satisfying, justice-satisfying, death was offered in my place. And, His God-exalting, sin-defeating, heaven-securing resurrection sealed the whole deal for our justification, sanctification and glorification. The death of Christ is absolutely central to all of this. So, if the Lord of the church has established this ordinance and says – Do this, we do it. If you have a take it or leave it attitude about communion, you therefore have a take it or leave it attitude about the invitation of the Lord Christ has His command to participate with Him. It is similar to what happened to Peter in the upper room. If communion brings no gravity to your life, if there is no understanding and appreciation for its seriousness and the call for holiness, then I do not see how you can claim to be a follower of Christ. Do not misunderstand me. Participating in communion does not make you a follower of Christ. But, treating it flippantly is a reflection on the fact that you do not understand what it means to be a follower of Christ.

If you make light of communion and fail to appreciate what the significance of this is, you are aligning yourself with one of the Lord's enemies. The word "guilty" (NIV) is a legal term, which means one who is liable for punishment. Paul is saying that if you abuse the Lord's Supper, you are on the side of those who killed Christ. If you claim identification with Christ, but you use the celebration of the Lord's Table as an occasion for social enjoyment or status enhancement (Corinth) or as a ritual without personal significance, you will be held accountable. You are living as an enemy of Christ. It is true that no one is worthy of communion, but, we can participate in a worthy manner. That is why...

2. **Communion demands reflection.**

A. **Examine yourself.** – v.28

Before we observe the Lord's Table, we must examine ourselves. What is an examination? It is a test of your condition. This exam is when the church looks at itself. This is the time when you look at yourself to see whether or not you are tried and true. You are called to examine the authenticity of your faith. 2 Cor. 13.5 says, "Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you – unless of course, you fail the test?"

This is scary for some of you. You would rather be doing something so that you do not have to ask yourself the tough but necessary questions. What am I really living for? What is my real motivation? Do I really believe and follow Christ? Am I serious about dealing with sin in my life? What steps am I going to take to address any life-dominating sins? How far am I really willing to go in order to have a clear conscience before God?

A gal told me one night that she had stolen some things from a local store, but she confessed it to God and wanted me to tell her that was all she needed to do. I told her, what she knew in her conscience but did not want to face was that she needed to go back to the store and return the merchandise or pay for it and ask forgiveness. She was not willing to do that, and to my knowledge has never returned to church. She chose bondage over freedom, she chose darkness over light. She chose falsehood over truth.

Some of you are so afraid of being quiet before God, that you fill your life with noise and distractions. You are afraid to look into the mirror of life because you are scared of what you really are inside. You choose a shallow existence when you fail to stop and take inventory of your life. What you do not look at will hurt you. You are afraid of seeing your failures, your need, your sin. But when you see that, and drag it into the light, that is when the mercy and grace of God is set loose to come running.

B. Consider your relationship with others. v.22

V.22 is pretty clear, but in reality that is what this entire context is dealing with. If you have alienated others from yourself because of your sin, you need to do what you can to clear that up. Do you look down on other believers? Do you consider yourself to be superior? Do you think, that person does not have a thing to teach me? Are you bitter at someone? Is there an unresolved relationship here in the body? You need to go to that person, and take full responsibility for your sin and humbly ask forgiveness.

C. Think on Christ. – v.29

The Lord's Table is a time for us to really focus on Christ. Recognizing the body of the Lord is not referring to the church body, although that is not a bad idea, but this statement in v.29 is actually speaking about recognizing what makes the person of Christ so unique. He was God in human flesh. He was sinless. He physically lived with sinners yet He Himself remained separated from sin. He was never liable for judgment because He did not sin, yet took upon Himself our sin and as a literal man, He died on the cross for you to satisfy the judgment of God against your sin and then He rose again for you to demonstrate that His payment was accepted in full, and He will return one day. The Lord's Table looks back to the cross, looks in at our lives, looks forward to the kingdom, looks up to the present interceding ministry of Christ, looks around at the body of believers and looks out for those who need to hear the gospel. What an incredible time for the body! But if we turn the sacred into commonplace – look out!

3. Communion is a time for personal judgment. – v.29b

If you do not judge yourself, you will still be judged. Think of it like this: Parents must teach their children self-discipline. If a child does not learn to discipline himself, then he is asking others to discipline him. If you do not drive your life in the proper lanes, you will have a collision. Then you will be disciplined by the police. So, the choice is yours, discipline yourself and live free. Or do not discipline yourself and live in bondage. It may appear at the moment to the kid that his parents are being cruel and unusual by

teaching this, but it is one of the most loving things a parent can so that the child learns to live free.

This is exactly the same thing in the church. This text is a command for us to examine ourselves. The Lord's Table is the formal, specific time for you and me to examine our walk and relationship before God. This is the most loving thing you can do. If you do not examine yourself and you do not address the failures in your life, it will affect others. Then, others will have to be involved in helping you examine your life. If you do not listen to the counsel of others and throw it all away because you are believing the lie that you can live any old way that you please, then when you stand before God, my friend you will be in serious, serious trouble. The most loving thing we can do is examine ourselves. We have become so allergic to the idea of being judgmental, that we have thrown all introspection out of the window. We have to examine ourselves. But, in our examination, we do not need to condemn ourselves. Christ took my condemnation.

Otherwise,

4. **Communion will be a time for God's judgment.** V.30-32

These words are serious. I will come back to them in the future and work through them in a little more detail, but one story may help you understand the heart of this.

Years ago a man came into my office to tell me that he was divorcing his wife. He had no grounds for this action. He claimed to be a follower of Christ. He was plain and simple choosing to live a self-centered life. I said, you are not living as a follower of Christ, because what you are doing is not consistent with the faith. If you are a follower of Christ, God will take you to the woodshed. I don't know when, or how, but He will. I would not be a good friend if I did not tell you that. But, when He does, and your life hits the wall, please call me, because I will come. He listened, but carried out his plans anyway. Several months later, he was rushed into the ER. He was told you have hours left to live. He called for me. He wanted to repent. He did. He did not die, his health was restored to him for several years and he was reconciled to his wife.

The Lord's Table is a critical, yet gracious summons from our holy and good God to reconsider the most awesome truth in all of life. Since we are so easily distracted by the lesser gods of this world and far too easily satisfied with lesser things, this ordinance is so needed to call us to love and treasure the gospel above all, and long for his kingdom to come.