

The Lord's Supper

"Body Anguish"

First Corinthians 11:27-32

Next time you order at Starbucks, tell them your name is Spartacus. When they call it out, stand up and shout, "I'm Spartacus," and wait for others to do the same.

"I'm Spartacus" was a line made famous in the Kirk Douglas 1960 film version of the story.

Quote: "After the army of former Roman slaves led by Spartacus is defeated in battle by legions of the Roman army, a Roman general stands before the captured surviving members of the slave army and demands that they turn over Spartacus, or else all of the former slaves will be executed. Upon hearing this and not wanting his friends to be executed, Spartacus stands up to surrender himself. Before he can utter a word, the loyalty of his friends is so great that each of them stands forward in succession, shouting "I'm Spartacus!" until thousands of former slaves are each insisting "I'm Spartacus!" Bewildered and still not knowing which of them is Spartacus, but impressed by the loyalty he inspires in his army, the Roman general has all of the slaves crucified in a miles-long display alongside the Appian Way leading back to Rome."

The slaves thought of themselves as one man - so much so that they were willing to die as one man.

With regard to the celebration of the Lord's Supper, there ought to be unity among the participants. Everyone partaking of the elements is a part, a member, of the one body of Jesus Christ.

By our behavior, we ought to be declaring, "I'm the body of Christ!"

In Corinth, there was no sense of the one body. Instead Paul said,

1Co 11:18. For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it.

1Co 11:19 For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you.

1Co 11:20 Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper.

1Co 11:21 For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk.

Instead of the one body there were "divisions" and "factions." It is this deliberate lack of unity, and the behavior surrounding it, that is the context of verses 27-32.

1Co 11:27 Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

This word, "unworthy," is about your behavior. None of us is worthy of approaching the Lord, except by His mercy in providing the way of salvation.

Some of the Corinthians were celebrating “in an unworthy manner,” by promoting divisions and factions in the way they ate the meal preceding communion. Getting drunk wasn't helping any, either.

To be “guilty of the body and blood of the Lord” is debated by scholars. There’s no solid agreement on what it means.

If we stick to the context... In the world, there are only two groups of people: Christians and NonChristians. Those who by their behavior do not identify as one with the body of Christ are, in fact, identifying with the only other group there is - nonbelievers for whom Jesus died.

They are behaving as though they were in the crowd, yelling, “Crucify Him!”

That may seem extreme, but it’s the comparison Paul makes. I think we need to more often see just how radical our behavior is when we are taking lightly the things of the Lord.

Husbands and wives, for example, often toss around the word, “divorce” during their conflicts. It isn’t just a helpful suggestion to eradicate the word from your vocabulary. It’s usage is irreverent to the Lord:

Since a husband is to love his wife the way Jesus loves His church, to threaten divorce is to portray Jesus as threatening to divorce her.

Since a wife is to submit to her husband as unto the Lord, to threaten divorce is to actively rebel against Jesus.

1Co 11:28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

Paul should not have needed to point out to these believers that what they were doing was unworthy. Seriously, shouldn't it be obvious that hoarding food at the pot-luck, and getting drunk before church, is unworthy behavior?

OK, I'm not doing that. But I should stop and examine myself for what I might be doing, even if it's in secret, that is just as unworthy.

I'll throw out an obvious one, just to illustrate. If I'm gossiping and backbiting, how is it I think I can come to the Lord's Supper and display unity with my brothers and sisters? I cannot; I am really identifying more with worldlings.

Having examined myself, then I partake as one with the body.

BTW - There is an interesting doctrinal nugget in these verses. Notice that Paul has twice referred to the elements as bread and wine. He doesn't call them "the Lord." They are not mystically transubstantiated into the body and blood of Jesus. They remain bread and wine.

At Communion, I am not ingesting the Lord; I am remembering Him, and proclaiming His death.

1Co 11:29 For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

The “body” in this verse is us - the earthly body of Jesus. A chapter earlier Paul had said, “For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread” (10:17).

Once again, the point is that we are to be one body, united, not dividing and factious.

“Not discerning the Lord’s body” means not assessing the individual members and their needs. The wealthy believers who were hoarding their food and wine were not assessing the needs of the poorer brothers and sisters.

The “judgment” is explained in verse thirty:

1Co 11:30 For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.

“Sleep” is how Paul referred to the physical death of a Christian. Your body awaits resurrection, but the moment you die, you are absent from the body and present with the Lord. You are conscious and aware - not a disembodied spirit.

Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. Moses has yet to be resurrected, but he had a form; he wasn’t a disembodied spirit.

Corinthian believers were getting weak, sick, and were dying, as a judgment from God on account of their behavior at the Lord’s Supper.

First John 5:16 says there is a “sin unto death.” God may decide to take the life of a sinning believer. The “death” is physical death. God at times purifies His church by removing those who deliberately disobey Him.

The apostle John makes a distinction between the “sin that leads to death” and the “sin that does not lead to death.” Not all sin in the church is dealt with the same way, at the same time. In Corinth, God determined that their behavior at the Lord’s Supper, if left unchecked, was a sin unto death.

You shouldn't be worried if you have sinned leading to death; just confess your sin, and it becomes moot.

If you are worried you’ve done something, but don’t know what it could be, chances are pretty good you haven't sinned unto death.

Ananias and his wife, Saphira, are the other biblical example. They sold a piece of property, then conspired to lie about how much of the proceeds they donated to the church. God struck them dead. It all could have been easily avoided.

1Co 11:31 For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.

Nothing mysterious there. “Hey, Ananias, how about we don’t lie to God?” “Hey, family, how about we share our food at the pot-luck preceding the Lord’s Supper?”

“Hey, wife (husband), how about we quit threatening each other with divorce?”

1Co 11:32 But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.

You're a Christian and will not be "condemned with the world." But that doesn't mean sin should abound in your life.

IF you are weak, or sick, or die as a result of sin, it is a form of God's "chastening," i.e., discipline.

Examine yourself before you partake of the Lord's Supper. In fact, examine yourself all the time. Better that you judge yourself than you come under God's discipline.

You and I should always be able to stand and shout, "I'm the body of Christ!"