

The Lord's Supper: A Beautiful Picture of Unity

There are many things in this world that picture unity. Consider a flag as entire countries find pictures of unity in their flags. I think of armies and their companies, each one with its own unique flag or banner, or even special songs (Each of our armed forces has their own special song). I think of the unity candle at weddings, symbolizing the uniting of husband and wife, or my wedding ring. There are many things we use or do to unite groups in this world. For the Christian, it is baptism and the Lord's Supper. Concerning the Lord's Supper today, it is a picture of unity UNLIKE any other in existence. It shows we are united together as a church, as a special people in this world. And out of everything we do (physically) it is what most visibly makes us a community. The truths revealed in this ordinance are as deep and mysterious as the Godhead. But, the one truth I want to consider briefly this morning is that of unity. I want to emphasize 2 truths: 1) The Lord's Supper unites God's people in doctrine; and 2) The Lord's Supper unites God's people in love.

1. The Lord's Supper unites God's people in doctrine. When we take the Lord's Supper, we say to the world: This is what I believe! What we do today says to the world, "*Here I stand!*" As we eat and drink, the bread and the juice reveal the core of our belief system. I get this from Jesus's words when he says, "*This is my body, broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me.*" And "*This cup is the New Covenant in my blood . . . As often as you drink it, remember me.*" And, yes, there is a particular emphasis on remembering the broken body, which is the cross. And we do remember the cross and what it accomplished for us. But, there is so much more implied than merely the cross. Though we are compelled to preach the cross and him crucified (1 Cor. 2:2), we must understand SO MUCH MORE. We must ask, "*Who is this man who died on a cross two thousand years ago?*" And where do we get our answers? We get them from the Word of God! And there is so much about the ONE who died on the cross that John says, "*the world itself could not contain the books that would be written of Him*" (John 21:25).

When we remember the cross, we remember WHO HE IS! And we learn that He has always existed. For, "*He is the image of the invisible God . . . By him all things were created . . . He is before all things and in him all things hold together*" (Col. 1:15-20). What we know and see and can say about God, so we say the same about the Son. We know that before the incarnation, before creation, before anything we know about, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit have existed in a perfect loving communion. (beyond comprehension). And if these things are not true about Him, we have no cross.

When we "remember" this morning, we recall his birth, his long before prophesied glorious birth. Isa. 9:1, 6: "**The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone . . . for to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.**" In 7:14: "**Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel.**" When we look at the cross, we remember the incarnation. Speaking of Jesus Paul says, "**who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. being found in**

human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:6-8).

We also remember his life. As the Son of Man and the Son of God, He was without sin. He came to do the will of God (Matt. 6:10; Matt. 26:42; Heb. 10:1-9). Now, we know the will of God focuses on the cross. For this is why He came . . . **“not to be served, but to serve and give his life a ransom for many”** (Mark 10:45). But, in order for the cross to be effectual, we must know that when He laid down his life, he laid it down as One who never sinned, though He was tested in every way as we are (Heb. 4:15). Our Lord never sinned in his actions or his motives. In EVERY way, He fulfilled the Law of God and its requirements. And, we must know that He wasn’t merely sinless, as if any creature can be sinless. As He as fully man, He was also fully God. And in this mystery is veiled the most beautiful truths. And because of this union of two natures in one person, his sacrifice was infinitely more than a mere creature who has no sin. When He laid down his life, we have the most beautiful, infinite, holy, perfect, SACRIFICE. And we know this because God accepted it. And for those who trust Christ this morning, ALL the wrath and judgment our sins deserve fell upon Him. And all of WHO HE IS in righteousness falls upon us. This is why we must remember his life when we remember the cross.

But, we cannot stop with his death. We remember that He did not stay dead. He rose again . . . by His own power. And in the power of his resurrection, we have life. The same power that rose Christ from the dead is the same power that changes us. **“If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation”** (2 Cor. 5:17). And the same power that rose Christ from the dead is the same power that will raise us from the dead. And it is the same power that works in us in the process of sanctification.

And as we remember the cross, this morning, we must also remember our Lord’s ascension. After 40 days spent with his disciples, He ascended back to the Father, where He sits now. And He poured out the Holy Spirit upon his people, in a way unmatched in the OT, ushering in a “New Covenant.” As we will say in a moment, **“This is the cup of the New Covenant in my blood.”** And now, as our Great High Priest, He intercedes for us. This means when you sin (as a Christian), you have ONE who says to the Father, “I’ve covered his/her sins.” **“There is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus”** (Rom. 8:1).

And that’s not all. We take the Lord’s Supper NOW, **“until He comes.”** This means there will be an end to this ordinance when He comes back as God’s anointed conqueror (Is. 63:1-6). With these things in mind, do you see what the cross should bring to your mind as far as doctrine is concerned (and I’ve only hit the majors). When we take the Lord’s Supper together, it is the greatest picture of Christ unity in doctrine. Today, these are the things we believe! Here we stand! ALL of this is doctrine! ALL of this is theology! And without ALL of it, we have no cross.

Application: This means we must be clear on the gospel. We must be clear about what we believe. Otherwise, it will be mere formality, and much worse. Consider Paul’s words to the Corinthians in 11:27: **“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.”**

Application: Taking the Lord's Supper and remembering must compel all of us to study the Word of God! The more we know and understand about Christ, Who He is, and What He has done, the more the Holy Spirit will use to comfort us in this world. There is a direct proportion between knowledge of doctrine and our comfort in this life. So I urge you brothers and sisters, know the word! For in knowing the Word, the more we able to "remember" Christ and the more beautiful He is to us.

Application: The more we know, the more we can offer. (Illustration of bread and water vs. steak and lobster).

2. The Lord's Supper unites God's people in love. Not only does the Lord's Supper unify us in doctrine, it unites in love. And the context is the LOCAL BODY. Though ALL Christians in the world are united by the Spirit into one body, PRACTICALLY we work out this unity of love here. According to one theologian, "*The Lord's Supper is ground zero for learning how to love*" (Thornbury). We must remember that the Lord's Supper is a communal ordinance. This means we take the Lord's Supper together. In NT times, it was often called a "Love Feast." As we remember the greatest act of love in the sending of the Son, we are compelled to love one another. For Paul, the Lord's Supper is test case of love. In the midst of all the problems in Corinth (pride, celebrity following, misuse of spiritual gifts, sexual immorality, etc.) the Lord's Supper is the place where love is applied.

Think of the context (turn to 1 Cor. 11). When Paul rebukes the Corinthians practice of the Lord's Supper, he ultimately rebukes their heart, specifically their lack of love for on another. Look at v. 17: **"But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse."** In v. 18 He says, "I hear there are divisions." In v. 19, there are "factions." In v. 20 he says, **"When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat."** And in 21-22 he says: **"For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not."** In v. 27 he says some are eating in an "unworthy manner." They are "guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord." And those who do so in v. 29, **"drinks judgement on himself."** And in v. 30: **"That is why many of you are weak and ill and some have died."**

Now, concerning doctrine and their understanding of the gospel, they were unified. However, in love they were not. And this is clear in the way they observed the Lord's Supper. Their congregation was made up of Jews and Greeks, men of women of different ethnicities, colors, rich and poor, slave and slave owner (a substantial number were slaves and those who were poor). And when they met in homes, apparently the rich were eating and drinking and observing the meal before others could come (see vv. 20-22). I picture a large home with a dining room full of the wealthy eating and drinking, while those of a lower class waited in the atrium for them to finish, only to receive some leftovers for their part in the "love feast."

We do not have the same context in the way we take the Lord's Supper. In their context, the meal was the center of their meeting. They opened with: **"This is my body broken for you"** and they ate and sang and prayed and spent time in the OT Scriptures and Apostle Teaching, had

fellowship. And they ended with “*This cup is the New Covenant in my blood.*” It is hard to gauge our love in the Lord’s Supper. But the principle is the same. How do we treat one another in our home groups, in our meetings, in the times we spend together, in the ways we serve (or not serve) one another. Love is void of meaning without actions. It is what we do that proves who or what we love! The application of Paul’s letter to the Corinthians is found in cp. 13 which says, **“If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”**

For application today, I would like to read our covenant and make some comments as we go.

Application: Tangible acts of kindness and acceptance gives the Christian community the credibility necessary to do evangelism. This truth also spills over into our homes as parents. “Love One Another.” This is the beginning of evangelism.

At the end of the day, the Lord’s Supper is rooted in the truth of the Gospel (doctrine). And these doctrines are applied in the way we love one another. These truths of the New Covenant reflect the two greatest commands: 1) Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and 2) Love your neighbor as yourself. This ordinance unifies us in these two ways deeper than any other thing we can do as a NT church.