



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapelDallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

1 Corinthians 11:23–34

1 Corinthians

“Paul and the Lord’s Supper: Part V”

TRANSCRIPT

. . . I’d like to read again verse 23 through verse 34 of 1 Corinthians chapter 11. The apostle writes,

“For I have received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: That the Lord Jesus, on the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread. And when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, ‘Take, eat, this is my body, which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of me.’ In the same manner, he also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in my blood; this do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till he comes. 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. But let a man examine himself and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself not discerning the Lord’s body. For this reason many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.”

We’ll talk about that later on, but the word “sleep,” the Greek word *{koimao}* is the term that is used to describe a believer’s death. And it is a beautiful term. Of course, it’s never to be used of an unbeliever’s death. But it’s used of a believer’s death, and it refers to his body. The body sleeps.

The spirit goes to be with the Lord. But it is a marvelous figure because it suggests that the person who has died in the Lord is really alive for so are they who are sleeping. And furthermore, it suggests that they are resting. And the Scriptures even use the term of those who had in the presence of the Lord as resting from their works. And not only are they alive and resting, but when a person is sleeping, we look forward to his awakening. And that is true of believers, for their awaking or awakening is the resurrection of the body. So it’s a beautiful figure used only of us. When we die we sleep, our body sleeps, our spirit goes immediately to be with the Lord. So,

“For this reason many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.” (That is, they have died, physically)

“For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged, but when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world. Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come.”

The simplicity of the early church in its ministry provides a very striking contrast with the complexity of the modern church and its machinery, the machinery that characterizes the meetings of the churches today, especially our larger churches. There is, in my opinion, great peril in the addition of other things. There is liturgy in many of the churches. There are numerous programs that characterize the meetings of the church. There are suppers. There is nothing wrong with a supper, but some churches are characterized by suppers, bazaars, even bingo. Even Sunday school is something not found in the Word of God. And, strictly speaking, my feeling is that the church would be better off if there were no Sunday school and the children were taught by their parents, much better off.

When I come up Sunday morning to Believers Chapel, and I see someone drive up, let out a couple of children to go into Sunday school and then drive off, that is a message that is very, very

significant. Because the message is plainly that the meetings are not worthy of my attention. They’re worthy of yours for a while. And when that youngster grows up, he will say, “I’ve reached the age now where I don’t have to go to church. I’ll do like my dad did. I’ll drive any children I have there, and I will go off and have a cup of coffee with my friends” or whatever one may want to do. Even Sunday school itself, if it is not carefully supervised can really be harmful ultimately to a local church.

These are just some of the things. We have annual meetings. We have elections. We have choirs. We have skits. We have dancing. We have ballet.

Now, characteristic—I can remember when I first began to speak of these things, they used to talk about skits and ballet and dancing and things like that and say in the liberal churches, but now it’s in our evangelical churches. They are filled with ballet and skits and various types of things that characterize the Sunday morning programs. Not incidentals. Not a meeting in the church once a year when everybody gets together to have a supper and maybe have a little fun, but, no, in the worship services.

So the early church was a very simple worshiping body. So far as we know, they came together on the Lord’s Day. And on the Lord’s Day, as the book of Acts puts it, “Their meetings were characterized very simply by the ministry of the Word of God, the observance of the Lord’s Supper, and prayer,” those three things. Listen to how it’s put in Acts chapter 2 in verse 42. Luke writes, “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.”

Now, I mentioned last time, I believe, if not last time, the time before, that the construction of the great text makes it plain there are not four things here but three things. The word “fellowship” is not a meeting of the church in which we might have just social fellowship. It’s often been understood that way by individuals who haven’t looked carefully at the original text. But the “fellowship” is the term that is used to describe the two final things, the fellowship of the breaking of bread and prayers. So the early church was characterized by very simple meetings. They came together, observed the Lord’s Supper, there was time provision for the ministry of the Word of

God—and that’s placed first for emphasis, apostle’s doctrine—and then the fellowship of the breaking of bread and in prayers, very simple. Therefore, things gathered around the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ as set forth in the Word of God and then typified in the Lord’s Supper and the saints prayed together, no doubt, not only for their own spiritual benefit but for the benefit of others to whom they were witnessing. So very simple.

Acts chapter 20 in verse 7 has it this way, “When they came together on the first day to break bread.” That was the primary thing, Luke says, they came together to break bread, not to hear the preaching primarily, not to pray primarily. They came together to break bread or to have the fellowship of the breaking of bread and the prayers that accompanied it.

The highlight of the simple worship of the early church is the Lord’s Supper. They came together to break bread. Two features characterize the apostolic ministry and the ministry of the meetings of the churches in the days of the apostles. There was—as the apostle let’s us know in the 14th chapter of this book, there was a meeting in which there was flexibility for ministry and the things that he describes in verse 23 of 1 Corinthians 14, “But each one in his own order Christ the first fruits,” I’m reading chapter 15, therefore—14:23, “If the whole church comes together in one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are uninformed, or unbelievers, will they not say . . .” that and so on. And I still am not reading the right text. Verse 26, “How is it then, brethren, whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, has an interpretation that all things be done for edification.” So it was a flexible meeting in which the church came together characterized by the ministry of the Word of God primarily, the observance of the Lord’s Supper, and the things the apostle sets forth as accompanying it.

So the priests exercise their priesthood by prayer, because every believer is a priest and that office is the office in which we, as priests, offer prayers to the Lord God. When we get down upon our knees by our beds or chair or wherever we pray and offer a prayer to the Lord God, we’re acting as a spiritual priest. We serve in the office of priesthood. So every believer is a priest—not certain individuals who have carried out certain church activities and have been appointed such by churches,

but every believer in Christ is a priest. That’s what the Protestant Reformation set forth so plainly, Martin Luther particularly, who had been a priest, making the point so well that every true believer is a priest.

So they exercised their priesthood. They exercised their spiritual gifts, which we will talk about the next time we meet together. And that was the characterization of the spirit-led meeting. The Lord’s Table, so far as we know, accompanied the meeting every time they met.

I mentioned last time that one of the earliest Christian writings after the time of the New Testament is the work called the *Didache*, the teaching. In the earlier part of the second century, one part of it is a manual of what was happening in the church. The other part of it has to do with practical matters in the Christian’s life. But in the *Didache*, there are these words, “On the Lord’s Day of the Lord come together, break bread, and hold Eucharist.” The date—we’re not absolutely certain, but perhaps around 125 to 35 A.D.—that was the picture of the early church.

I mentioned also last time that Howard Marshall, one of the leading evangelical scholars of the present day, professor of New Testament Exegesis at the University of Aberdeen in Scotland, in one of his books, eleven—well, it really is now about fourteen years ago, wrote these words—“In line with what appears to have been the practice of the early church in the New Testament, the Lord’s Supper should be celebrated frequently in the church, and there is good reason for doing so on each Lord’s Day.”

Now, he’s not a member of the Christian Brethren. He was a Methodist, as far as I know, and still is. But that’s his opinion. I mentioned also that John Calvin said, “The supper should be observed very frequently and at least once in every week,” the Great Reformer. John Wesley, the leading Methodist of its history, led the early societies in the observance every Sunday.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon—all Baptists revere Mr. Spurgeon. Even those who are not Calvinist like he was, they quote him. Here in Dallas, you can turn on the radio occasionally and hear [a] Baptist preacher—he will cite Mr. Spurgeon. They don’t believe the doctrines that Mr. Spurgeon gave in his Calvinistic teaching, but they recognize him as an important figure, and they recognize

also that he says lots of things that are good that don’t necessarily touch on the ways in which they disagree with him.

Charles Haddon Spurgeon wrote, “Shame on the Christian Church that she should put it off to once a month. There are those, of course, more often put it off to once a quarter. They once know the sweetness of each Lord’s Day. Celebrating his supper will not be content, I am sure, to put it off to less frequent seasons.” He was a little overly optimistic there because there are many people who do come into the Lord’s Supper and leave and don’t come back and maybe come back weeks later. And with some of us it’s very easy, we all know, to lose the joy of sitting at the Lord’s Table and realizing just what it signifies. Later on, I’ll try to make that point.

Well, the first part of Paul’s account here emphasized participation. The second part, as you can tell from the things that we read in our Scripture reading, emphasizes preparation for the Lord’s Supper. Let me just briefly begin at verse 23 and make a few comments. Verse 23 begins, “For I have received.” What our Lord did controls the Lord’s Supper, “For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you.” In other words, the apostle says, “What I am giving to you was given to me.” Therefore, it has solemn significance. The apostle, just the very fact that he is the apostle of Jesus Christ, should make it a solemn thing for us to hear what he says with reference to the Lord’s Supper. But when he tells us this is what the Lord told him, then if there is such a thing as listening to our Lord more than his apostles, well, then we should listen even more intently to what the apostle says here because he says it comes from the Lord.

Now, he talks about the bread in verse 23 and verse 24 that “The Lord Jesus, the night he was betrayed he broke the bread and said take eat this is my body which is broken for you, this do in remembrance of me.” What he is trying to say particularly is that the new Christian Passover sacrifice is the sacrifice of our Lord himself. And just as the sacrifice of the Passover in the Old Testament, the lamb led to the liberty of the children of Israel from the bondage in Egypt, so we are celebrating the liberty that we have as a result of the sacrifice of our great lamb, the antitype of all those lambs that were slain throughout all the Passover days down to modern times. Today, of course, the Jews

do not slay the lamb as the Word of God says. And thus they don’t keep the Passover, though they say they are observing the Passover season.

The Passover Haggadah that is part of their liturgy reads this way: “He brought us out from slavery to liberty, from sorrow to joy, from morning to holiday, from darkness to great light, from servitude to redemption.” That’s part of that which is celebrated in Jewish synagogues if they read the liturgy, but oh how significant it is for Christians to realize the reality that lies back of that. That is what he has done for us.

So the early church then was characterized by the Spirit-led flexible meeting, the observance of the Lord’s Supper, and the characterizations or the characteristics of the early church meetings which the apostle will describe in chapter 14. You can also notice there is a great stress upon the activity of men in 1 Corinthians.

John Robertson was a student at Dallas Seminary. He’d been in prison, and he was converted, came to Dallas Seminary. I’m not sure where John is now. But a number of years ago, when Believers Chapel was a very young congregation, he used to occasionally come out, and we got to know—I got to know him even before he came to Dallas Seminary. But we got to know him in Believers Chapel. It was many years ago now, probably twenty-five. But he once made a statement that I thought was very interesting because he [was] passing judgment on what he saw of the Christian Church, and he said, “The church today is full of strong women and weak men.” That’s twenty-five years ago. I wonder what he would say today.

Bruce Waltke, in a meeting here at Believers Chapel in 1981 commented on the fact that one of the things that was unusual about Believers Chapel and one of the things he liked was—these are his words—“The great proportion of men who are active in the ministry of the Chapel.” Now, I am grateful for that. I thought it was an observation that was true at that time. I hope it’s still true, but it was characteristic of the church. I appreciate, I think as much as anyone, the work of the women in the Chapel because this Chapel could not do the things that it does, the Word could not go out as it does go out were it not for the women who sacrificially labor in Believers Chapel. Just come in

during the week and see who’s active in Believers Chapel. And go back in the tape ministry and see who is there. And you’ll see that there is a meeting of both the men and women. But I am so glad that the Chapel is characterized by men who have, by God’s grace, given themselves to the truth of the Lord.

Now, he talks about then bread, and he talks about the cup in verse 25 and verse 26. He says in the same manner also he took the cup after supper saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. This do (this go on doing literally) go on doing.” That’s the present tense. It’s one of the things you learn when you just take up the Greek language that the present tense often, in fact more often than anything else, speaks of durative action, continuing action. “Often” [it] can be rendered simply go on doing, go on doing this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me. In the early church, the probable order was that the church came together, they observed a fellowship meal. There is reference to this in the New Testament even. It’s called the love feast. They came together. They observed a meal together. And then they observed the Lord’s Supper. There’s no certainty about this, and what I’m giving you is a partisan account, although many believe that that is true, that’s precisely the order. They came together, probably they had a meal, a fellowship together, then they observed the Lord’s Supper. I’d like to say this also about the word “supper.” The term “supper” is the Greek term $\{de\ \acute{\alpha}\ \rho\acute{\iota}\nu\alpha\}$.

Now, the Greeks didn’t eat as many of you do. Have a nice breakfast with eggs and bacon and orange juice and coffee and cereal and all of the other things that you eat for breakfast. And then at lunch, well, lunch is a rather full meal. You go to the restaurant, and you order various things off the menu. And then at night you come home for what we call dinner, and that is your largest meal of the day.

It’s not that good in Charleston, South Carolina, when I grew up. We had a nice breakfast, and then we had a big dinner. But it was about two o’clock to 3:30. Very great frustration to traveling salesmen who came from other places, ate at twelve o’clock, decided to go and call on their customers at 1:30 or so and were startled to hear their secretaries say they were ready to go home to

eat dinner, and it was dinner. And they would come back about 3:30. It was very frustrating. I think things have changed a little bit at home. But that was dinner, and then at night supper.

This time the Greeks, they ate this way. In the morning, they had very little, a piece of bread and a glass of wine, and that was it. In the middle of the day, they weren’t like the businessmen of the city of Dallas for example. They ate wherever they were. And usually, again, it was just whatever they could put their hands on. It was a very light meal. But at night they came home, and they had their dinner. And the term used to describe it is *{deipnon}*. *{ariston}* was the term used for breakfast, but *{deipnon}* is the big meal of the day. Suggestive perhaps of the fact that the Lord’s Supper, if we put in our language, would be better described as the Lord’s Dinner.

So in their sight there was more to it than we’re liable to think of as supper. That is, they gathered, and it was a gathering with which they had fellowship with one another more than simply the eating of the bread. The bread was normally broken, the wine which was red like blood, as Genesis chapter 49 puts it, very fitting to represent the blood of Christ. The picture then is of, as our Lord said, “His body that is given for our sins, and the blood that was shed that the new covenant might be ratified.” This is a twofold picture of his fate. It said specifically I must die sacrificially. “Give my body and my blood must be shed.” Everything led up to this.

The cup, incidentally, is more than a simple reminder. It’s the visible token, just as the blood was that which was the ratification of the covenant. The covenants were ratified by the shedding of blood. So the cup is more than a simple reminder. It is to us the visible token, the absolute guarantee that our sins and iniquities he will remember no more because it represents his death. As we look at ourselves, we might say woe is me as Isaiah said, “For I am undone.” But as we note and reflect upon the wine of the Lord’s Supper representing the blood that was shed, we know our sins have been forgiven. There are no woes any longer for those whose trust is in the one who shed his blood.

I mentioned last time, just an important little thing to keep in mind, our Lord never partook of the Lord’s Supper. He did not take the bread first and then give it to them, eating it himself. So far as we can tell, Luke says, he gave it to them and he said, “Divide this among yourselves,” Luke 22,

verse 17. So then he told them as Luke says and Paul picks it up, “Do this, go on doing this in remembrance of me.”

Now, my feeling is that when he said, “Do this in remembrance of me,” he really meant more than just a simple reflection upon what our Lord had done. I think he means for us to enter very significantly into this dinner. And to realize that it is here we are fed spiritually.

Now, you might say, “Well, our Lord is at the right hand of the Father. How can he feed us spiritually down here?”

Well, our Lord has—because he is the eternal God, is omnipresent, isn’t he? It is entirely within his power to be with us here in the meeting and to feed us spiritually as we partake of the bread and the wine. After all, this was food. This is the supper, the dinner that is food. And so this is an occasion upon which we are fed spiritually. Calvin says, “This is done by the power of the Holy Spirit.” He, in his bodily form, is at the right hand of the Father, but by virtue of the fact that he is the omnipresent Son of God, he, through the power of the Holy Spirit, feeds his saints at the Lord’s Supper spiritually. And so as we partake of the bread, and as we partake of the wine, it’s for our sustenance, spiritual sustenance. We don’t meet here just to say, yes, I do remember that that happened years past, and I appreciate that. It is a supper. It is a dinner. It’s a time in which we actually come together and are fed spiritually.

Now, obviously if we come and think it is only to remember what was done, that’s very simply done in a few seconds, and it’s all over. And I think our meetings sometimes are very, very, light and superficial. If that’s all we think the Lord’s Supper is. It’s more than that. And as we sit, we are spiritually fed by the risen Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit in our meetings. That’s why the Lord’s Supper is so important for believers.

Well, I want to say just a word about this remembrance, though. “Do this in remembrance of me.” It’s sad to think that’s necessary, isn’t it? That we have to be reminded of what our Lord has done for us? “Do this in remembrance of me.”

Jeremiah has a word about that. He used a figure of speech. Ever noticed what brides-to-be talk about for weeks before the wedding? What they are going to wear, isn’t it? What they are going to wear, what their bridesmaids are going to wear, what their maid or matron-of-honor is going to wear. Occasionally they talk about what the men wear, but they are not really interested in that. They are interested in what they are going to wear and what their bridesmaids are going to wear. You don’t have to tell them a few days before the wedding, remember you’ve got to get a wedding dress for the wedding. Well, they’ve been thinking about that for a year or so.

Jeremiah has a word for that. He says, “Can a bride forget her ornaments—I said—Can a maid forget her ornaments or a bride her attire?” No, that’s big with them, isn’t it? “Yet, my people have forgotten me, days without number.” Do you know we have people in Believers Chapel who—I’m not sure what I’m saying. I want to say this is my opinion. This isn’t the elders’ opinion. I haven’t talked to them about it. It’s not the deacons’ opinion. In fact, I don’t know that I’ve talked to anyone about it, except I may have said something to Martha. She’s the perfect wife. She just keeps glum—I mean, mum. [Laughter] But do you know there are people who regularly attend the Chapel who never attend the Lord’s Supper? Isn’t that strange? Our Lord himself says, “This go on doing in remembrance of me.” And we don’t attend the Lord’s Supper. I accept some that go to other churches as well as the chapel, and they observe the Lord’s Supper there. I appreciate that. And sometimes our meetings are very disappointing.

Many years ago Howard Prier made a statement to me that I think is very true. I was complaining about the meetings. And he said, “Well, the meetings are a reflection of our spiritual condition. And if our spiritual condition is poor, then the meetings will reflect that. If our spiritual condition is good, and we are filled with the sense of our relationship to the Lord and the desire to glorify him and magnify his name, we’ll not only be talking to someone outside of the assembly or church, but we’ll be in the Lord’s Supper and rejoicing in him as well. But if we are not, the problem may be really deeper. And it is our own spiritual condition.”

So he says, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim,” this is the word that means to herald, preach, “You preach the Lord’s death till he come.” Proclaim, recall. Actually you’ll remember at the Passover, that’s precisely what the master of ceremonies at the Passover supper did. He explained to them every time they had the Passover, the meaning of Israel’s deliverance. And so here, every time the Lord’s Supper is celebrated, we proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

What coming? Well, he’s already mentioned the coming earlier in chapter 15 in verse 23. He writes, “But each one in his own order Christ the first fruits afterwards those who are Christ’s at this coming.” So our Lord is coming, and we are proclaiming in this intervening time from his death and resurrection to the time of his coming, we are preaching the Lord’s death. Every observance of the Lord’s Supper according to Paul is an evangelistic service also, in case there are those there who do not know our Lord. And even for those of who do, it’s a proclamation of his death. Nothing could be more significant than that, can it? We talk about how we would like to have the courage to witness of our Lord and his sacrifice and what he has done for us. This is one way in which this may be done, and he might find the Holy Spirit feeding you at the Lord’s Supper in such a way that you become strong enough to talk about him to your friends outside.

Now, in the last few verses, verse 27 through verse 34, the apostle writes, “Therefore”—actually this is a result particle or conjunction that means something like, “it follows that.” So then, it follows that, “Whoever eats of this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.” At our meetings almost once or more a month, Mr. Prier or whoever else is leading the meeting will make reference to this statement, “Whoever drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner,” and usually will begin by saying we are all unworthy, and that’s correct. We are all unworthy. But we who are unworthy recognize that because we’re all sinners and, in that sense, we are unworthy.

It’s an outpouring of astonishing grace that S. Lewis Johnson Jr., sits at the Lord’s Table as unworthy as I am. I wish you had known my past. You might still have doubts of me. Astonishing grace. I’m always unworthy.

But what does he mean here in the context about eating unworthily? Well, to eat unworthily, is to eat in such a way that you contradict the purpose and spirit of his coming, his sacrifice. So in the context, you remember they were coming together and some were arriving before others and greedily consuming their food, perhaps the rich who brought the better meal. They were eating their food before the others who were poor and were unable to share. And so to eat unworthily is to eat greedily. And, furthermore, the apostle has already told us earlier in the chapter that there are factions among them.

Verse 18, “For first of all when you come together as a church I hear there [are] divisions among you and in part I believe it.” And so it is not only possible that some came with the nicer food and ate it quickly before the others so they didn’t have to share it, but they also ate only with those with whom they were in the closest of relationships.

Have you ever heard of cliques in evangelical churches? Now, don’t sit there looking pious. Every one of you, if you’ve been around a church much, you know that you have heard that because they do exist in churches. So eating unworthily is to eat contradicting the purpose the spirit of what this signifies and also what his coming signifies because all who believe in him are going to be caught up there.

Rabbi Duncan was a Scottish professor, and he said many unusual things. He was a great teacher of the Word of God. In fact, I even have a biography of Rabbi Duncan. He was not a Jewish man, but they called him Rabbi, Rabbi, because of his skills in interpreting the Old Testament. But he used to say, “It is said about this taking of the bread and the wine, [Scottish brogue] “Tak it woman, tak it—it’s for sinners,”” For some woman who was feeling so unworthy that she wondered how she could take the bread and how she could take the wine.

Now, Paul says in verse 27 also, “Therefore whoever drinks this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.” That is, he will not understand he will be eating and drinking out of the spirit of the church as the church should be. He will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. He will be guilty of sinning against that which the ceremony is designed to celebrate. And so Paul calls for examination.

Verse 28, “But let a man examine himself and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.” Moral scrutiny. The principle is important as we sit at the Lord’s Table. There should be preparation before participation. In fact, ideally, we should be prepared before we ever come to the place of meeting, but if we are not, there should be careful examination under the guidance and conviction of the Holy Spirit concerning our own life before we partake of the elements that are past. “Let a man examine himself and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup,” preparation before participation.

Of course, anyone who comes in a meeting where the Lord’s Supper is being observed, he shouldn’t partake if he’s not a believer. He cannot remember the Lord in the sense in which this is set forth. So conversion is the first principle of all. There must, first of all, be conversion before we can enjoy the things of the Lord.

I remember many years ago hearing a story of Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse, who was pastor of the Tenth Presbyterian Church, I think I’ve mentioned him before that he was pastor of the church that Jim Boyce is the pastor of now, for at least twenty-five years, because I went there and was a speaker at his twenty-fifth anniversary celebration in Philadelphia, and that was many years ago.

Dr. Barnhouse was a man who was very hard to control. He was not the kind of Presbyterian you think of a Presbyterian. He was—he could be very dignified. He could be very forceful. But he was as he often said, in fact once told me, said “I’m kind of like a bull in a China shop because he couldn’t help but come out with the things he felt in his heart.” And they always were astonishing to people.

Well, he in one of the church meetings after the Presbytery had been meeting in his church. The Presbytery, the wider body, met in the Tenth Presbyterian Church, and he refused to partake of the bread and wine. And the reason he did was that he said to them, you have not executed biblical discipline with respect to several members of this Presbytery who have turned to liberalism and, therefore, I am not eating the bread and drinking with these unbelievers here, and you yourself not having exercised discipline against them.

Well, that was very shocking. But the meeting was in his own church, so they didn’t do anything about it. But the Presbytery met, usually those days met about once a month, and so the first thing, order of business was to take up Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse and try to discipline him. And so he was in the Presbytery, and he was called before them, and he is charged with failure to observe the purity and the peace of the church by doing what he did. And so he stood up—according to the story that I heard many years ago—he stood up and he said, “Yes, the book of Church Order does say the purity and the peace of the church, but you will notice, my brethren, that it says purity first. Because if there is not purity, there is no peace, and we have a problem of purity.” And I don’t think they did anything to him other than to say perhaps a few bad things about him.

Anyway, when we sit at the Lord’s Table, it is required that a man who partakes of the bread and the wine be a converted man or a woman, a converted woman. Normally that individual would be one who has been baptized in water. Converted and baptized in water, our Lord, those are the two ordinances of the Christian church and ordinarily they should precede our partaking of the elements. And then of course, as we have been talking about, our communion with our Lord should be in harmony with what Paul is talking about here. We have title to sit at the Lord’s Table and partake by our conversion and our baptism, but we have the right to sit and enjoy the Lord’s Supper if we are in communion with him.

He says in verse 29, “For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner, eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body.” Now, I think this is an inclusive term refers to the church as a body. And the individual who eats in a unworthy manner, as those were at the Lord’s

Table in Corinth, they were not discerning the Lord’s body as a body of people who together have been united in the most intimate union possible upon the face of this earth, more significant even than husband and wife, united with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. So brethren, sisters, this is the most significant of all unions. Our Lord expressed that when they said, “Your mother and your brothers are outside.” He said, “Who is my mother? Who are my brethren?” Those who have received the Word of God, they are his brothers. They are his mother.

Now, the last few verses, verse 30, “For this reason,” ah, for this reason. In other words, “For some reason many are weak and sick among you and many sleep.” For what reason—disorder at the Lord’s Table and the lack of relationship with the Lord that that expresses; obviously what they did at the Lord’s Table was a reflection of what their hearts or the condition of their heart. “For this reason, many are weak.” He is talking about physically weak because when he says they sleep, that is physical death. Many of you are weak and sick, sickly, and many sleep. In other words, it’s perfectly valid for us to say if we are in bad health, is it because of our spiritual condition?

Now, I’m not going to suggest to you if we stay in good spirits or condition, we are going to live forever, not under the present circumstances. But what Paul says here is that our spiritual condition does have a relationship to our physical condition. So for this reason, many are weak, sick, sleep, some sleep, many sleep. Three spiritual statuses here, so to speak. Notice moves to gradually stronger discipline. Some of them are only weak, some are sick, some have died. These stages in the discipline of the Lord God. Salvation is not lost, but service is lost, “For this reason many are weak and sick among you and many sleep.” They have fallen asleep. There is such a thing as sin unto death. It is something that we all must think about. We have to ask ourselves these questions. Our spiritual condition may be reflected in our physical condition. So Paul says, “Many are weak, many sickly, some also sleep.”

And finally in verse 31, “For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.” If not self-judgment, then judgment. How—how do we examine ourselves? Well, examine our heart,

examine our mouth, examine our hand. That is, look inside at our own spirits and ask ourselves questions such as does my life really reflect a relationship, personal relationship with the Lord.

What about my mouth? We can do a lot of damage with our mouth, can we not? Some of us have great ability in this. Some of us need to curb it. Put it in the right channels. And then our hands. We sit and we do nothing in order to further the work of the Lord. Let others do it. We come. We sit in the meetings. Let others do it. There is such a thing as Christian ministry of work, Christian ministry of giving, all kinds of ways in which we may serve the Lord and express our relationship to him in the warmth and worship of our hearts, the kind of words that come out of our mouths that glorify the Lord, and then the work that we do to enable the saints together, the church together to do its work well. Is there indifference? Is there unbelief? Those are questions we must ask ourselves. Let me conclude with just a few words.

What is the supper then? Well, it’s an ordinance of communal commemoration. We do look back and we remember what our Lord has done for us. And we also know that through this feast that continues, our Lord promises that we shall receive the benefits of the spiritual food which he accomplished in his death on Calvary’s cross, the benefits which we are still enjoying to this day. How great the Lord’s work was that we today may be fed at the Lord’s Table through the Word of God in such a way that we are still experiencing the benefits of that which took place two thousand years ago. It’s an ordinance of triumphant celebration. We do this in the light of his coming again.

It would be nice for us every time we sat down at the Lord’s Table and reflect upon this simple fact: “Who is the host?” Why, the host is our Lord. It’s not the elders of Believers Chapel. The host is our Lord. And what are we? We are those who are being served by the host, just as when you are invited to someone’s home and you sit at the Table and enjoy what they have prepared. That’s what we do at the Lord’s Table.

One of the persons that I have read with reference to the Lord’s Supper said this, “Of course there is much, much more than this where the Lord’s Table simply, a tie with an unforgettable past, the ever-lengthening chain of celebrations, would speak of separation rather than of union, of

the Lord’s absence rather than of his presence. Could our eyes be opened when next we meet in faith and love before the white robe table at morning or at noon or when the shadows fall and the lamps are lit? What should we see? The mortal pastors, mere implements, would disappear, the silver on the table. Jesus would be seen there, not on the table but beside it. Jesus would be seen to break and bless and give. Jesus would be seen thus to seal to his happy covenanters, those who now enjoy the benefits of that new covenant. Once again, their pardon, holiness in heaven, their union with him and with one another, all the gifts of the Spirit, all the benefits of the passion, yes the sacrament is the same today as in the Upper Room.” The gift is the same, and the giver is the same. There are just other people at His Table.

John Chrysostom said, “Even today it is he who doeth all and delivers it even as then.” And it’s the ordinance of gospel proclamation. As Martin Luther said, “It’s the brief summary of the gospel itself.” Take, eat and drink, not only remember, but also receive the food.

I like what the old Scotch woman used to say when young relatives came home after the communion service, and she would ask them, “Did you meet anyone in the service?” And if on their part if they attempted to avoid the thrust of the question by mentioning some of the relatives that they had met and the other people, she would say, “Yes, I know all about that. But did you meet anyone in particular?” And to that aged Christian, the Lord’s Table was a trysting place where we met him, fundamentally. That’s what we do at the Lord’s Table. I think that’s why Believers Chapel observes the Lord’s Table every Sunday. What we do miss when we are not here to observe the Lord’s Supper [is] receive from him the blessings that are ours that flow out of what he did two thousand years ago. Let’s bow in prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee indeed for all that the Lord’s Supper means to us, that the Son of God should give us this marvelous feast in which he is the host. We are the guests, and we feed at his table, enjoying those tremendous blessings that have flown from the work that he did, that flowed from the work that he did two thousand years ago. O God, we thank thee. May we

“Paul and the Lord’s Supper: Part V” by S. Lewis Johnson
Copyright © 2007 Believers Chapel, Dallas, Texas. All Rights Reserved.

truly observe the Lord’s Supper in that spirit in the future. Bless the coming observance this Sunday,
the Lord’s Day, wherever our Lord is honored in this service.

For Jesus’ sake. Amen.