

Second Sermon for the Day of the Lord's Supper

1 Cor. 11:27-34

Dr. Martin Luther
From Luther's *House Sermons*

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1 Cor. 11, 27-34. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another. And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come.

This text is of great importance and deserves be attentively considered by Christians. We have already learned, from the previous sermon, how the people misunderstood these words, so as to deprive themselves of the comfort contained in the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, yea, even shunned it as something dangerous.

It is true, Judas did not receive this Sacrament to his consolation or amendment. There were also many among the Corinthians, as St. Paul tells us, who received it unworthily, and thus brought upon themselves bodily and spiritual punishment. There is indeed a difference in the reception of this Sacrament ; some partake of it worthily and unto eternal life, but others unworthily unto condemnation, inasmuch as they do not repent and have true faith. Hence it is of the first

importance that we learn to- know what is meant by the expression "eating and drinking worthily or unworthily."

[Some teach] that one should not partake of this Sacrament except he be entirely fit and perfectly pure. Such fitness, however, they made dependent upon certain works of penance, much eulogized by the priests; such as auricular confession, castigation of the body, fastings, prayers, giving of alms, and the like. These were accounted sufficient satisfaction for the sins committed. But such worthiness is of no account; for it is impossible by our own deeds to become really pure and worthy before God. Even the disciples were not perfectly pure when Christ gave them His Supper, for He tells them that they have need of washing their feet, by which He meant not the

washing with water, but the forgiveness of their sins.

Let us then learn to understand and to remember, in this connection, that they do not receive the Sacrament unworthily who know and mourn their wretchedness; who confess that they are poor, miserable sinners; who experience many a temptation; who are yet affected by anger and impatience, by passion and intemperance. Such and similar sins adhere to us more or less as long as we live on earth: and if we earnestly repent of them, and do not continue in them against the warning voice of our conscience; if we seek their forgiveness and consolation in the misery which they brought upon us, we ought not to be deterred from coming to the Holy Sacrament. As long as the old Adam is within us, it will surely happen that impatience, wicked thoughts, and the like, will trouble us and cause us to sin. If we then had to remain away from the table of the Lord until we had become entirely free from sin, we would, indeed, never be fit to come to this Holy Sacrament.

They, however, receive it unworthily who knowingly and intentionally persist in their sins, such as revengeful wrath, murder, fornication, adultery, and similar manifest sins and crimes. Christ instituted the Holy Sacrament unto the forgiveness of our sins, that we should forsake them and not continue in them. Judas received the Sacrament unto his condemnation and death, because he had determined to destroy the Lord, and did not recede from this his wicked purpose.

Some people are shocked by this example; they know that they are guilty of hatred, malice, and other sins, wherefore they will not come to the Lord's Supper, but postpone it from day to day, and from year to year, simply because they are unwilling to give up their anger and their hatred. Such persons commit a twofold wrong; they cling tenaciously to their sins, and also

wickedly despise the command of Christ to partake of His Sacrament. These people should desire to put an end to their wrath and envy, should strive to desist from sin, and should long to obtain, through the reception of the Holy Sacrament, remission of sins and strengthening of their faith. If then there is yet remaining a glimmering of sin and weakness, if now and then evil thoughts and passions make their presence known, we must cry unto God and pray: O Lord, give me a peaceable, kind and loving heart, and cleanse me from my sins, for Christ's sake. Thus can we come to the Supper of the Lord in faith and hope, without being terrified by this saying of St. Paul; for this does not pertain to those who long to be liberated from the bondage of sin, but to those who are therein, and do not desire to be freed, but rather find pleasure in their wickedness and defend their evil deeds. The Corinthians were such people; wherefore the apostle tells them: "I praise you not," indicating that they were not penitent, and yet desired to be praised as good Christians.

The custom prevailing at that time in regard to the Lord's Supper was different from the present. The Christians came together in the evening, and each one ate whatever he had, in the presence of the others. Sometimes it happened that a part ate and drank too much, while others who had nothing suffered want. Such conduct the apostle condemns. He declares it to be damnable, if persons deliberately sin, and then go to the Sacrament as though nothing had happened. They who act thus, eat and drink the Sacrament unworthily, and God punishes them with sickness and other afflictions.

You observe that such wickedness is far greater than the shortcomings of wavering hearts which, seeing the error of their ways, return to the path of duty and earnestly pray: O God, we have done evil before Thee; forgive us our manifold sins. Christ will surely pardon them, and invite them to His Supper; He does not invite the self-

righteous and saintly, but just these poor sinners, who on account of their guilt are greatly troubled and in sorrow. This He means by the words: "This is my body given for you unto death, this is my blood which is shed for the remission of your sins." Surely, they must have been great and guilty sinners for whom such a glorious sacrifice and such a great ransom was offered. The great requirement, therefore, is this: we must discover that we are really sinners, and then come to the Table of the Lord for comfort and relief; but he who will not confess his sins nor amend his ways, should by no means come to this Holy Sacrament.

It is often the case, and strangely so, that those who need not fear, unto whom God is truly merciful and whom He would own as His children, are sorely troubled with fear, whilst those who ought to tremble with terror are entirely unconcerned and think not of their sins, but continue straight on upon their wicked course, as would a rifle ball when once discharged. We see this in the example of [some Christians]. They scorn and persecute the word of God, put to death the faithful Christians, and force people, in violation of their conscience, to commit idolatry; still they think themselves pious and holy, and are right merry in their delusion. On the other hand, the little company who do not sin intentionally are diffident and affrighted; they lament the sins of which they were once guilty, and wish that they had never occurred. Thus it is, those who might have consolation do not lay hold upon it, whilst they who ought to fear are secure and devoid of every terror.

In reference to this fact the apostle Paul says: "But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup." To examine one's self means to consider well in what condition we are. If we find that our hearts are hardened, that we are not willing to refrain from sin, and that we do not fear its presence, then we may well conclude that we should not go to the

Sacrament; for we are then no Christians. The best thing we could do, under such circumstances, would be to put a stop to such wickedness, to repent, to trust faithfully in the promises and mercy of God, and to unite again with Christians in the participation of the Holy Sacrament. If, however, we are unwilling to do this, we ought not to approach the Lord's Table; for we would surely eat and drink damnation there. Let us carefully meditate upon what eternity has in store for us, if we thus fall under the judgment of God. If we are mindful of this, we will not be slow to repent, to put aside anger and other kinds of wickedness, and to make our peace with God in His Holy Supper. Again, if our hearts are contrite, if we confess our sins before God and are heartily sorry on account of them, if we believe that God in mercy, for Christ's sake, will pardon us, then we are well prepared and can confidently say unto the Saviour: O Lord, we are poor sinners, and therefore come to Thy Table to receive consolation. If we approach the Sacrament in such a spirit, we shall be truly ready and receive the richest blessings. In behalf of such contrite and sorrowing souls the Lord's Table was prepared, so that they might find there consolation and joy. Those, however, who are without penitence, and who continue in their haughtiness and sin, will not be relieved of their fear and will surely be damned. Some of the old teachers in the Church understood this word of the apostle: "Let a man examine himself," as excluding from the Sacrament all persons who are guilty of manifest crimes punished by the civil government, such as murder, adultery, lewdness, and the like. This is a mistake; for, as we have seen above, only those who willfully continue in their sins, and will not amend their lives, are cautioned to refrain from partaking of the Sacrament. These would only augment their account of wrath; for by coming to the Table of the Lord they make a pretended profession of Christian faith, of

which not the least symptoms are discernible in their lives.

Whosoever has been guilty of these great sins, and has repented of them, ought not to be deterred by them from seeking absolution and receiving the Lord's Supper. Let him come and pray unto God to give him strength to avoid such wickedness in the future, and to lead a better life. Likewise our infirmities, which daily vex us, ought not to keep us away; for of these we shall never get rid entirely while we live in this world. If it were then our determination not to come to the Sacrament until we were perfectly righteous and pure, we would be compelled to stay away from it forever.

I can speak from my own experience in regard to this, and I know the effects of the avoidance of the Lord's Supper. I was under the influence of this devilish delusion, and became more and more a stranger at the Lord's Table. Avoid this error, my hearers, and see to it that you come of-

ten and well prepared; if sin and crime rest heavily upon your souls, forget not then your Lord and Saviour; think of His death and sacrifice for sinners; repent and trust in Him. This, and no more, He requires of us as worthy guests at His Table.

Our great infirmity and daily transgressions, for which we need support and forgiveness, as well as the unity of faith and confession thereby established in the Church, make it an imperative necessity that we should frequently celebrate and receive the Lord's Supper, thus fulfilling His command: "Do this in remembrance of me." Therefore, whosoever comes to the Table of the Lord as a poor sinner, is yet worthy and well prepared; nor will he eat and drink damnation to himself; but he will receive the body and the blood of Christ worthily, unto his soul's salvation.

May God grant us this blessing through His Holy Ghost, for the sake of Christ Jesus, His Son, our Redeemer. Amen.