

Examining Ourselves Before We Come to the Lord's Supper

1 John 3:11–23

I am going to preach to you today. I am going to preach to your ear and your eye. I am going to expound the Scriptures, which is preaching to your ear. I am also going to administer the Lord's Supper. That is preaching to the eye. Both are going to proclaim the redemption we have in Christ.

Most of the time when I have been a part of the Lord's Supper, it has been banished to the end of the service. It is like an add-on to a regular service. We go through what we normally go through, then we have an invitation and, instead of dismissing, we begin a "second" service which is the Lord's service. I do not do it that way. I like to have a Lord's Supper service. Everything is leading up to the moment we partake of this supper.

The Lord's Supper is an amazing picture. It is a dress rehearsal for the wedding feast in heaven. It is exciting. Jesus commanded us to do this in remembrance of Him. He did not say in remembrance of Him. This is a celebration—a celebration we are supposed to take part in frequently. You say, "How frequently?" The Bible does not specify. Some churches partake of it every Sunday, and others two times a year. Churches all across this nation fall somewhere in between. We do not have a specific command on the number of times a year.

If you are not in a saving relationship with God through Christ today, I am going to ask that you do not take the bread and cup, but, as they come around, take Christ. Receive Him into your heart as those around you receive the food. Then immediately afterward, come up and tell me about what you've done so we can get you ready to receive the Supper the next time as a child of God.¹

Mom and dad, we have all the children in the service this morning. I am going to ask for two things.

- Number one: help me keep a spirit of reverence in the service by dealing with any distractions.
- Number two: it is good for your children to watch you come to the table without them.

¹ Timothy Keller, *Center Church: Doing Balanced, Gospel-Centered Ministry in Your City* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 306.

They must realize they cannot live on your faith. This is an amazing gospel opportunity for you. If they ask, “Why can’t I get a piece of bread and a cup of juice?” the correct answer is not because they are not members of the church. They will not understand that response. They are here as much as you are. The reason they cannot partake is because they have not been spiritually saved. Do not waste this gospel moment!

This service is a spiritual examination. I plead with you to open your life up to the One who already reads you like an open book. You will never find anything in your life that God does not already see. You must stop and ask yourself, “Do I really want to see the dark areas in my heart before I come to the Lord’s Table?”

I am going to do something unusual for us. I want all of us to stop right here and have a silent prayer that God will use the light of His Word to reveal the darkness in our hearts this morning. You may have unconfessed sin, a known sin, or a shady area in your life that is affecting your relationship with God. You have not stopped long enough to identify them; you have been around so much noise; you have neglected your quiet time with God. It is in the quiet times that God will often show us the darkness. (Time of silence and prayer.)

Transition: Let’s start our examination process with God’s Word. First,

1. Look in your life for resolve (1 John 3:11–13).

1 John 3:11–13 says, “For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain [who] was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous. Do not marvel, my brethren, if the world hates you.”

John begins this epistle by once again calling this church to love. He tells them they have heard this message from the beginning. We must ask the question, “From the beginning of what?”

- The beginning of this epistle? Yes (1 John 2:5).
- The beginning of John’s writing ministry? Yes (John 13:34).
- The beginning of their Christian journey? Yes (Matthew 22:34–40).
- The beginning of time? Yes (Leviticus 19:18). All of the above.

John quickly moves from calling us to love to showing us an Old Testament figure who failed to display love. Cain and Abel had the same biological father, but they had different spiritual fathers. Cain “was of the wicked one”—Satan. It is interesting, however, that Cain was

no atheist. He was deeply religious. He believed in God. I know this because he brought an offering to Him. The offering he brought was rejected.

I would agree with others that God accepted Abel's offering just as He often accepted the offering of many Old Testament saints—by sending fire from heaven.

- When Aaron, the High Priest, offered his sacrifice in Leviticus 9, God sent fire from heaven and consumed the offering on the altar.
- When Gideon offered a sacrifice to God in Judges 6, God responded by sending fire from heaven.
- When Elijah battled the false priests of Baal in a duel of true and false religion, God responded to Elijah's offering by sending fire from heaven to lick up the water around the altar and consume the offering (1 Kings 18).
- In 1 Chronicles 21, David offered sacrifices to God, and God answered by sending fire down from heaven.
- Finally, when Solomon dedicated the Temple to God, we're told in 2 Chronicles 7 that fire came down from heaven and consumed all the sacrifices they were offering.

Both Cain and Abel had seen the fire of God fall from heaven on their sacrifices before, validating their offering as acceptable, and they had seen it happen for years now. But this time, no fire fell for Cain. The serpent who deceived his mother had obviously been delivering to him the same lies.²

You see, Cain wanted to worship God his own way, and it was rejected. He saw his brother's sacrifice accepted and he grew bitter. Night after night, the hatred, jealousy, and resentment for his brother increased until finally it culminated in the first murder of human history. He slaughtered his brother. The word speaks of a violent and brutal killing.³ He proved he was of Satan: Satan was a murderer from the beginning (John 8:44).

² Stephen Davey, "Refusing to Raise Cain," Colonial Baptist Church, accessed April 4, 2016, <http://media.colonial.org/files/PDFs/CBC/20130602-am.pdf>.

³ Cleon L. Rogers Jr. and Cleon L. Rogers III, *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998), 596.

Cain hated his brother because he was deep in the practice of sin and his brother was not. It is the same reason this world hates Christians now. When someone's sinful life comes face-to-face with Christ-centered living and truth, they only have two options:

- Repent and accept Jesus, or
- Detest the one who exposing the sin.

It has been going on for a long time. The recent decision from the Supreme Court forcing gay marriage on all states has Christians around the nation in an uproar. It should! But, friends, notice in verse 13 the phrase "Do not marvel"; this literally means "STOP!" Stop being surprised that the world hates you. Do not be mistaken by the little word *if*. It is a third-class conditional clause meaning it will happen. You could translate it "because" or "when." It speaks of a guarantee that the world will hate us. Stop being surprised that the world hates you.

We have such a strong understanding of American history, but we neglect church history. We think we have the "rights" not to be persecuted. We have no rights; we have a guarantee that the world will hate us. Paul said it too: "All that live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12). There is not a footnote that leads you to the bottom of the page to state, "Except those living in America." Friend, stop being surprised and accept that we are hated.

We do not belong here; they know it, and we know it. The world has a message, a song, and a movie, and they are all anti-Christian. They are not just secular; they are against Christ. And we do not like it. We do not like the fact that the world hates us. We want the world to love us, accept us, and think we are normal. So we want to find an athlete, an actor, or a country singer who seems to have bridged the gap between being a Christian and not being hated by the world.

They could have sent out a tweet about being Christian, and we immediately want to identify with them when everything else in their life is against Christ. Why? We want to fit in.

- "He has a song that mentions Jesus in one of the lyrics." Just ignore the fact that his other songs talk about getting drunk and picking up women.

- “Well, she has a song where Jesus left heaven and came to earth, not to take away our sins, but to take the wheel.” Yes, and we ignore the fact that she supports gay marriage.⁴

We want to live this life and have no opposition from the world. Friend, it is not going to happen. The whole industry is against God and His children.

I am not saying these people are not Christians. I am saying that we should not put these people in front of our children and grandchildren to emulate. We look no further into their lives to even see if their life matches their message or if they are faithful to a local church. Jesus, to some of them, is a good luck charm, a rabbit’s foot, something that will give them good karma in their struggle to reach the top.

When the hate is unleashed in your life, will you have the resolve not to fold, if it costs you your job, or your status in Hopkinsville, or even your life. Will you have the resolve to take it?

The upcoming generation has been sold a lie that “Christian living” means material blessing, automatic protection, and bulletproof safety, but two millennia of Christian martyrs beg to differ.⁵

One man in India was skinned alive. He looked at his tormentor and said, “Take off the rags of sin. I will soon put on robes of righteousness.” Another martyr, Christopher Love, was being lead to the gallows. His wife applauded him, saying, “Today they will sever you from your physical head, but they cannot sever you from your spiritual head.” He went singing to the gallows.

Christianity is dangerous. The cross is offensive. The bloody cross will cause us to be persecuted. Today, right now, people in unreached people groups around the world will face abuse and death because they publically identify with Christ. Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s famous quote, “When God calls man, he bids him to come and die,” rings true for us today. Will you persevere? Do you have the resolve?

⁴ Emma Koonse, “Carrie Underwood Advocates for Gay Marriage, Causing Controversy,” *The Christian Post*, June 11, 2012, accessed April 4, 2016, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/carrie-underwood-advocates-for-gay-marriage-causing-controversy-76475>.

⁵ David Kinnaman, *You Lost Me: Why Young Christians Are Leaving Church...and Rethinking Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2011), 105.

Could you sing this hymn, “I am resolved no longer to linger, [I will not be] charmed by the world’s delight; things that are higher, things that are nobler, these have allured my sight?” I am not trying to give you a martyr complex. I am simply stating that the general flow of this world, of songs on the radio, of shows on the TV is anti-Christ. This should not make you feel weird when non-believers surround you. This should stimulate you to share Christ. Being a Christian can get you killed; do not flinch at the reproach!

Transition: Look in your life for resolve, secondly,

2. Look in your life for hatred (1 John 3:14–15).

1 John 3:14–15 says, “We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love [his] brother abides in death. Whoever hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him.”

We have seen time and again here that one of the evidences of being a Christian is that you love the brethren. I mean, you genuinely want the best for them. These two verses are staggering. In them, we discover that if we hate someone it is the same as murdering them. Examine your heart to see if you have an ill will towards anyone in this church, in your family, or even at your job. If you do, you’re not ready to come to the Lord’s Table.

Jesus came to fulfill the law. He did not come to do away with it. He came to do what you could not do: keep it perfectly. When Jesus came, He also came to raise the standard of holiness.

- The law said you should not commit adultery. Jesus said we should not even think about committing adultery.
- The law said you should not commit murder. Jesus said if you have hate in your heart it is just like committing murder (Matthew 5:21–22).
- Montaigne said, “There is no man so good who, were he to submit all his thoughts and actions to the law, would not deserve hanging ten times in his life.”

If the law asked me, “Have you ever murdered anyone?” I could say no. If Jesus asked me, “Have you ever murdered anyone?” I would have to say yes, because His standards are higher. He says if I have ever hated anyone I have murdered them in my heart. The only thing that kept me from doing with my hands what I have done already in my heart was the consequences.

- Who do you detest?

- To whom do you purposefully not speak?

Notice how John changes the language here. He says love the *brothers* (plural) and then clarifies it to say love the *brother* (singular, verse 14). Do you know why He does this? Because it is a lot easier to love the world than it is to love the person beside you at work or across from you at church. One man said it this way: To love the world is no big chore; it is the miserable person next door that is problem (anonymous).

The only difference between level 1 murder and level 2 murder is the outward act of taking the life. The inward intent is the same.⁶

* Let me be open with you. I have dropped a “mother load” on people in my mind. You probably have too. Let’s make sure all of that is confessed.

Transition: Look in your life for resolve (persecution is coming to this generation of Christians). Look in your life for hatred (Jesus examines our hearts). Finally,

3. Look in your life for indifference (1 John 3:16–22).

Verses 16–22⁷ challenge you to put feet on your love. John immediately sets forth the greatest example of love: Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ laid down his life for us expecting nothing in return. We had nothing to offer—nothing to pay back—no “you scratch my back, I scratch yours.” We were bankrupt in sin. Jesus laid down the payment—His life.

In a similar manner, we should lay down our lives for others (verse 16). Jesus was perfect; we are not. Jesus could pay for sins; we could not. Jesus could please the Father; we cannot—apart from Jesus. This is not saying, “Be Jesus.” It is saying, “Give of your life like Jesus gave of His life.” We should not just be out for ourselves.

Have you ever had anyone tell you, “I’ll die for you? With my last breath I will exhale my love for you.” Well, that’s nice that you will die for me, but while you are saying that . . .

- Could you give me a glass of water?
- Could you spend five minutes and sit down and speak with me?
- Could you try to reach out to my teenager who is in rebellion?

⁶ Warren Wiersbe, *Be Real: Turning from Hypocrisy to Truth* (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 1972), 124.

⁷ Typically, I would address the beautiful relationship between John 3:16 and 1 John 3:16, but during this particular study I have decided not to cover it.

- Could you help me get food on my table?

You see indifference is not a failure to do evil, but a failure to do good.

Notice verse 17. Three things have to take place in order for you **not** to show love to someone:

1. You need to have what someone needs.
2. You need to see the someone who is in need.
3. You need to ignore the someone who is in need.

If you have something someone needs (1), but you do not know they need it (2) then you are not accountable. If you know someone needs something (2), but you do not have it to give to them (1), you are not accountable.

Let's not just talk about love; let's practice it. Put our money where our mouth is. Our heart controls our hands. Let's put our time where our mouth is. Let's not turn a cold shoulder. Richard Foster, in *Celebration of Discipline*, says, "In some ways we would prefer to hear Jesus' call to deny father and mother, houses and land for the sake of the gospel than this word to wash feet. Radical self-denial gives the feel of adventure But in service we much experience the many little deaths of going beyond ourselves. Service banished us to the mundane, the ordinary, and trivial."⁸

John is using a greater to lesser argument: Jesus had a life to give, and you have stuff to give. He gave, and you should give.

When this happens it gives you . . .

- Assurance that you are a Christian (verse 19). It says, "I belong to and follow after Jesus."
- Confidence in praying (verses 20–23).

Some of you here are a little shaky in your prayer confidence or shaky in coming to the Lord's Table. You may have a condemning heart and a guilty conscience. Our conscience is not the Holy Spirit. Our conscience is by no means infallible. Its condemnation may be just or unjust. Your conscience could condemn you for leaving a 15% tip instead of a 20% tip, but that does not make the 15% tip a sin. On the other hand, your conscience may not bother you if you

⁸ Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (New York: HarperCollins, 2009), 110.

use guile and retell a story slightly different than it really happened, but it is still sin whether your conscience convicts you or not.

- Your conscience can be too lenient or too severe.
- Your conscience may call you out over things that you should not be called out about.

Eugene Peterson gives us a helpful reminder here, “God is greater than our worried hearts and knows more about us than we know about ourselves.” This gives a Christian confidence in his or her prayer life (verse 21). You can ask confidently because you know you are not holding anything back. You have dealt with the shadows in your life. You have confessed all known sin.

Conclusion

There are likely two groups of people here that should not take this supper.

- Non-Christians – If you can’t take the bread and the cup, take Christ instead.
- People (maybe Christians) who at this time do not feel comfortable taking it.

For the rest of us, let’s partake of this supper with eyes on Jesus.

For I 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.” [Let us remember that it pleased the Lord to crush Jesus (Isaiah 53:10).]

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. (1 Corinthians 11:23-29)

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1. Only regenerate men are fit to come to the Lord's Supper. No man in a natural state but must needs eat and drink unworthily, for he retains his enmity against God and Christ. Sanctified persons only are the proper guests. Purification went before sacrificing. The preparation and examination of themselves as to ceremonial uncleanness was strict before the passover, which was inferior to this ordinance, as the legal state was to the evangelical. The mercy to be now remembered is greater, the duties of preparation and devotion ought not to be less. The second grace to examine ourselves about and to exercise at this ordinance is sorrow for sin. This is necessary to the Supper. The way to an heavenly repast, as well as the way to heavenly mansions, is through the valley of Baca. The Lord's Supper, also known as Communion or the Eucharist is an important reminder of the sacrifice of Jesus. Here is what the Bible says about communion and it's role in the life of the believer. To partake unworthily is to come complacently, light-heartedly, giving no thought to that which the elements signify. I. H. Marshall explains: "In some Christian circles today the fear of partaking unworthily in the Supper leads to believers of otherwise excellent character refraining from coming to the table of the Lord. Lord Jesus, I bow before you in humility and ask You to examine my heart today. Show me anything that is not pleasing to You. Reveal any secret pride, any unconfessed sin, any rebellion or unforgiveness that may be hindering my relationship with You. Christ instituted the Lord's Supper in order for us to remember the great sacrifice He made for us and that we rely on Him and His sacrifice for our salvation. He gave us this memorial so we would not forget Him and what He did for us. In Luke 22:19, when Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, He said, "Do this in remembrance of Me." This is done to help us remember the Lord and what He did for us. We are to remember that our Lord gave up heaven to come to this earth for thirty-three years, and then died for us. We remember the humiliation of the mock trial, the crown of thorns and the terrible scourging that left His back raw and bleeding. We must first examine ourselves to determine whether we have the right attitude to partake of this memorial. We must put all else from our minds. The Title of the sermon is: Examining ourselves before the Passover. We all want to have a spiritually fulfilling Passover and Days of Unleavened bread but we also know it will take work on our part. Today I would like you to consider three things before you take the Passover this year. [15] And account that the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given to him has written to you; [16] As also in all his letters, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do. [20] When you come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper.