

Yes, but only when it's used in the right way! The same medicine that saves your life could end the life of someone else. God speaks in a similar way about the Lord's Supper. For the believer in Jesus who recognizes Jesus' body, it's a powerful blessing. But for those who don't believe—who don't recognize Jesus' body—it's still powerful, just not a blessing. It's a serious thing to sin against Jesus' body!

So, who should take the Lord's Supper? It would be nice to say everybody, but that's not what God says. You need to be a believer in Jesus, and you need to recognize that you're receiving Jesus' body and blood. Is that everybody? No! Not kids. Young children can't understand this. But it's not just kids. It's any person who hasn't been taught the truth about the Lord's Supper. Sadly, like those people in Corinth, even many Christians today deny that we receive Jesus' true body in the Lord's Supper. If they deny Jesus' body and take the Lord's Supper, what do they receive? Judgment. This is one reason we practice closed communion. It's not open to everyone.

There's another reason. Earlier in 1 Corinthians, Paul writes: "*Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf*" (1 Corinthians 10:17). God says the Lord's Supper is a powerful display of unity. When Christians join in the Lord's Supper, they are confessing that they stand united before God in what they believe. That's a beautiful thing! A real unity! This is why we sometimes call it close communion. Now, is it right to ask a guest in our church to stand up and confess their unity with us when they don't know what we teach? No. They can't! Jesus asks us to celebrate his supper only with those who are united in faith with us.

So are we mean? Only in our upside-down world that expects its will to be followed instead of God's. We don't practice close communion because it's easy or popular. Our practice is based on love. It's love for Jesus. His body and blood truly are special! It's love for Jesus' Word. We want to follow and teach everything God says. It's love for those who don't yet know the truth about Jesus or the Lord's Supper. Is it loving to encourage someone to receive the Lord's Supper to their judgment? No! Is it mean to want them to hear about Jesus first? No! Finally, it's love for each other and our desire to have God's Word taught purely among us. It's not mean. It's love!

That's really the point. Paul writes, "*For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*" This is what the Lord's Supper is all about—this is what our lives are all about—proclaiming the Lord's death. Every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we have the chance to preach to our guests and to preach to each other Christ crucified. Never be ashamed of standing up for your Savior. Never be ashamed of Jesus' words: "This is my body. This is my blood. Given for you." Come with believing hearts and receive God's hug.

1 Corinthians 11:23-32
Pastor Nathan Nass

Maundy Thursday
April 14, 2017

²³For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. ²⁷Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. ²⁹For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. ³⁰That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. ³¹But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. ³²When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.

"Why Are We So *Mean* Loving?"

Why are we so mean? A couple years ago, a new couple walked in from the parking lot for a Sunday service. I greeted them in the hallway. Their first words were, "Can we take communion today?" I asked, "Are you a member of a WELS church?" They said, "No." So I asked them not to join us for the Lord's Supper, but "I'd love to talk with you more after the service!" They walked past me, right out the front door, and never came back. I bet they were thinking, "Why are they so mean?" What do you think? Close communion is something that we need to talk about. Why are we so unwelcoming, so unloving, so *mean*, when it comes to the Lord's Supper?

I can understand why someone might think that. It seems today like the meanest thing in the world is to exclude someone from anything. The most unloving thing you can do is to deny someone something that they want. Because of that, we live in a country where we feel entitled to everything. We don't ever like hearing anyone tell us, "No!" So I can understand why people might be upset. Maybe you have questions too. If the Lord's Supper gives us forgiveness, if it's such a great blessing, why isn't it for everyone? As we talk about that, let's remember one thing: Whose supper is this? The Lord's Supper. Not ours. It's Jesus' supper. Let's listen to him!

That's what Paul emphasized in our lesson. He wrote, "*I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the*

new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” You’ve heard those words hundreds of times. I hope they haven’t grown old! In the Lord’s Supper, Jesus gives you his real body. His real blood. Given for you. Really you! So that you are forgiven. What a blessing!

But have you ever wondered why we need Jesus’ body and blood in the first place? It sounds a little gross, right? Why do we need body and blood? Because we’re that sinful. Do we realize that? 500 years ago, in Martin Luther’s day, people did something foolish. They tried to buy the forgiveness of sins by buying pieces of paper called indulgences. It was wrong! But a Lutheran pastor in 1817—300 years later—said something interesting about it: “At least those people realized they had sins that needed to be taken away. Nobody is concerned about their sins at all today!” If that was true in 1817, what would we say? We have forgotten the seriousness of sin!

That’s why there was the Passover meal. God never wanted the people to forget. Every single year, since about 1500 B.C. when God freed the Israelites from Egypt, each family was to sacrifice and eat a lamb—the Passover lamb. Lest someone forget the purpose of that meal, one part of the meal was this: Every year, the youngest child at the Passover table had to ask the question, “What is all this for?” And it was the father’s job to tell them. To tell them how in the past God had saved them through blood. To tell them how in the future God was going to send his Messiah who would shed his blood to take away their sins. Because we’re that sinful!

Saving sinners takes more than money. It takes blood. “*The wages of sin is death,*” God says (Romans 6:23). The penalty for sin is death. For Jesus to rescue us from sin, he had to pay that penalty himself. What did Jesus pay? Listen to these passages: “*He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree...by his wounds you have been healed*” (1 Peter 2:24). “*The blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin*” (1 John 1:17). What was the price? Jesus’ body and blood! Think of what Jesus is offering you in the Lord’s Supper: “Here’s my gift—not money, not power—me! My gift is me! This is my body. This is my blood, given for you, so you can have peace!”

Isn’t that beautiful? One of our confirmation kids asked a perceptive question. If we’re forgiven by faith in Jesus, if we’re forgiven when we’re baptized, why do we need more forgiveness in the Lord’s Supper? That’s a good question! God doesn’t explain why he offers forgiveness in more than one way. But God knows how the devil works. He knows how guilt weighs on our hearts. Forgiveness can sound too good to be true. It must be for someone else! But God doesn’t want there to be any doubt in your mind that you’re forgiven. So he takes his forgiveness and he puts it in your hand and he puts it in your mouth and he says, “This is for you! Given for you!”

Maybe think of it like this. It’s great when someone—like a spouse or a child or a friend—tells you that they love you. Those words have meaning. Those words in and of themselves should be enough. “I love you!” But it’s still nice to have a hug. It’s nice to hold a

hand. It’s nice to feel the touch of a loved one. To have those true, comforting words put in a physical, tangible way. The Lord’s Supper is like God’s hug. He tells you that he loves you and has forgiven you in Jesus. That’s absolutely true. But in addition to that, he takes all of his promises and he lets you touch them and taste them for your body and your soul. Like God’s hug. We get the body of Christ!

So why are we so mean? If communion is so great, why not let everybody come? Remember what we said earlier? Whose supper is this? The *Lord’s Supper*. God’s Word has more to say. Listen closely: “*Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.*” God says there’s a way to eat the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner. If we do that, what will we receive? Judgment!

We don’t want that! So we need to ask, “What does *in an unworthy manner*” mean? Our first thought is sin. Maybe I’m too sinful for the Lord’s Supper! Except, what does the Lord’s Supper do? Take away sin! Whom is the Lord’s Supper for? Sinners! If you’ve sinned, you need the Lord’s Supper! So what does “*in an unworthy manner*” mean? Paul explains for us: “*Anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.*” Those are very strong words. The person who receives the Lord’s supper without believing that Jesus’ body is really there receives judgment from God! It’s not for everybody.

So God encourages us to examine ourselves before we eat of the bread and drink of the cup. How do we do that? It’s always good to confess our sins, but the focus isn’t just on our sins. It’s on the enormity of what Christ did for us. It’s so easy for us to take Jesus’ sacrifice for granted. To stop being amazed at Jesus’ unbelievable love. As you prepare yourself for Communion, God wants you to believe Jesus’ words: “This is my body, given for you. This is my blood, poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins.” Slow down. Fix your eyes on Jesus. Then you’re ready!

Is all this really such a big deal? All this for a little piece of bread and a tiny cup of wine? Aren’t we going overboard? No! What in the whole world is a bigger deal than Jesus’ body and blood? When people took the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy way in Corinth, here’s what happened: “*That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.*” God allowed people in that church to get sick and die because they were misusing the Lord’s Supper. That doesn’t mean that if you are sick, you’ve sinned against the Lord’s Supper. But it means God is serious about this! It’s a wonderful blessing, but only when received in the right way.

Think about it like this: We have some powerful medicines in our world today. Medicines that God uses to heal diseases. But when you fill a prescription for some medication, it’s illegal to share that medicine with anyone else. Why? Isn’t medicine a good thing?