

What's the Message – Lesson 126

Come with us now as we continue our search for guidance in our own lives in matters of offense and behavior.

Greetings in the name of Jesus, our Savior. We turn to another of our favorite hymns for our opening today:

Salvation unto us has come, by God's free grace and favor;

Good works cannot avert our doom, they help and save us never.

Faith looks to Jesus Christ alone, who did for all the world atone:

He is our one Redeemer. Amen.

The hymn states a fundamental doctrine, that we cannot earn our justification; only Jesus can produce that. But we are expected to live a sanctified life, and a sanctified life is the subject of our study today. The people of Corinth had asked Paul about specific practices and attitudes that were taking place in their midst, and Paul is responding. The first matter we deal with today is something not at all familiar in our culture, but the principle is still applicable.

They asked Paul if it were permissible to eat meat that had been sacrificed to an idol. His answer may surprise you, and once again he begins with the underlying thought that "all things are lawful, but not all things are helpful." Starting in chapter 8, at verse 4, we read:

. . . we know that an idol has no real existence . . . however, not all possess this knowledge. Some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. . . . Take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. . . . And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is

weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble.

The principle that Paul is laying out before us is that although we have been given freedom through Jesus, we should not use this freedom to offend a “weaker member” of the Christian family. Weaker here refers not to physical strength, but to spiritual maturity. This is the doctrine of giving offense, and it is to be applied broadly to all of our relations with other Christians.

It is the same point Paul made in our previous lesson, that it is better to suffer wrong than to offend a weaker brother and cause him to sin. This may be a difficult point to accept, for it is easy to say, but so hard to put into practice.

Paul impresses this lesson upon us as he concludes this instruction with these words from chapter 10, verse 31 – 33: *So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved. Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.*

Next, Paul turned to the matter of the behavior of many in the church at Corinth during their participation in the Lord’s Supper. Instead of them treating it as an observance of the covenant Jesus instituted on Maundy Thursday evening, they had turned it into a gluttonous, drunken orgy. Paul wrote in chapter 11, starting at verse 20: *When you come together, it is not the Lord’s supper that you eat. 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. For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when He was betrayed took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke

it, and said, “This is My body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way also He took the ‘cup after supper’, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.

So, Teacher, what’s the message for us?

What’s the message for us? Paul is impressing upon them, and upon us, that the Lord’s Supper is a covenant with our Savior, an event we are to treat with great respect, and one we are to participate in with humility and repentance. We are to remember that the death of Jesus was for the purpose of gaining – for us – forgiveness for our sin. So Paul concludes his instruction with these words of warning: *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. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.*

There are underlying meanings and implications in each of the above phrases that are beyond the allotted time and scope of this course, but Paul’s instruction here is just as applicable to us today as it was to the Corinthians then. For with our participation in this Supper, we proclaim that Jesus died to take away our sin, and that we are now reconciled with God. We are to remember the horrendous price that Jesus paid, that He suffered for something that we deserved instead, and on our behalf He died a horrible death. We are to remember that He was forsaken by God, and bore the sins of the entire world, including the billions that had not yet been born. We are to remember that it was because of God’s mercy and incomparable love, that Jesus died for our benefit, then rose again to seal His promise.

St. Paul is teaching us that the Lord’s Supper is not an event to be taken lightly, or casually.

Next time we will learn more about the Church as the body of Christ