Examine Yourself – Important for the Lord’s Supper

Christian Briem · 1 Corinthians 11:27-32 · June 29, 2025



The verse in 1 Corinthians 11:27 has often been misunderstood as if the breaking of bread was only meant for the particularly worthy. But let's hear what the verse really says:

1 Corinthians 11:27: *“So whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.”*

In principle, every true child of God is worthy to take part in the breaking of bread. The blood of Christ has made them worthy. By nature, we were anything but worthy to come into the presence of God. *“But you have been washed, but you have been sanctified, but you have been justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God”* (*1 Corinthians 6:11*).
However, there is a danger of doing this in an unworthy manner. This is indicated by the circumstantial word “unworthy.” The example of the Corinthians makes this very clear to us. However, they had not yet sunk so low as to admit unbelievers and enemies to the Lord's Table. Unfortunately, this is done in large parts of Christendom

today, but this is contrary to God's thoughts in every respect. But they had partaken of the Lord's Supper in a manner wholly unworthy of the Lord, had made it a feast so that the apostle had to tell them that this was no longer eating the Lord's Supper at all.

Even when we come together on scriptural ground, we can still eat and drink unworthily, namely when we allow the ego any room, when we allow self-will to interfere in the holy things of God and take the lead. For example, if I were to say: “If this brother suggests a song, I will not sing along,” or: “If that brother says a prayer, I will not say Amen to it,” would I not eat and drink unworthily with such an attitude? If someone were to influence the course of the assembly meeting on his own authority without waiting for the Lord's instruction, if he were to bring forward something of his own that comes from his flesh, would it not be called bringing “strange fire” before Him?

There are many forms of unworthy eating and drinking. If we alone partook of them without inner exercises of the soul, if we remained indifferent to everything or were occupied with other things if we ate the Lord's Supper like an ordinary meal – would it not then have to be said of us that we are “guilty of the body and blood of the Lord”? Why guilty of the body and blood of the Lord? Because the signs speak of it! And if we eat and drink of them carelessly, we do dishonor not only to the bread and the cup but also to the body and blood of Christ, of which they give expression. How serious it is not to discern the body in this way! We would be eating and drinking judgment to ourselves (*1 Corinthians 11:29*).

Self-Judgment in Order to Eat

So what should we do when things are so serious? Is it best to stay away, just as David once refused to let the ark of the LORD come into his house because of the LORD's breach against Uzzah? That is an obvious thought, but it is a human thought, a thought not dictated by the grace of God. Today grace reigns, it reigns in righteousness, but it reigns, reigns unto eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (*Romans 5:21*). Therefore, the way, God's way is this:

“But let each one examine himself, and so let him eat of the loaf and drink of the cup.” (*1 Corinthians 11:28*)

God wants us to examine and look at our ways, our motives, and our heart conditions in His light, and He wants us to do this constantly. **The imperative “examine!” in Greek is in the present tense, which means: examine yourself constantly, continue to do so!** So we are not talking about a one-off, cursory skim of the events of the past week on Saturday evening, but God is talking about constant self-assessment in His presence.
I have already said that examining ourselves **does not only mean judging our ways, i.e. what we have said and done, but also our inner motives** for our actions and the inclinations and dispositions of our hearts. How much reason we will find to be ashamed and bow down before Him if we let the light of His word fall on us! But let us do it, beloved! The grace of God, which in Christ Jesus has forgiven us all our sins, allows and encourages us to be completely open before Him and to tell and confess to Him everything we find that is not good in us. This constant self-judgment is the basis of true joy. **Let us remember: Practical holiness always comes a long way before joy.**

On the other hand, if we are negligent in self-judgment, this is the surest prerequisite for a hapless life as a Christian and for many a slide into sin, indeed for the subsequent intervention of God in discipline. I am convinced that the low spiritual condition of God's people today has one of its deepest causes in the fact that we do not really and constantly examine ourselves and – if necessary – condemn ourselves. Healing and correction are only given to us in the way of self-judgment. Tell me, beloved brothers and sisters, have we ever asked our Lord and Savior whether He approves of our clothing, our leisure activities, our hobbies, our purchases, our vacations, our family life, and our spiritual occupation? Or are these and similar areas excluded from our Christian life? Have we ever asked Him whether the words of our mouth and the thoughts of our heart are pleasing to Him (*Psalm 19:14*)? Have we ever examined ourselves in the light of the Lord to see whether pride, arrogance, self-confidence, presumptuousness, love of the world, ingratitude, imperiousness or even greed fill and rule us? And what about our spiritual activities? Do we still read the Word of God with desire in our hearts? Does personal prayer still have an important place in our daily lives? Do we still enjoy attending the meetings of believers? Are we concerned about the salvation of lost sinners? Have we never asked

ourselves that? **Let us relentlessly apply God's standard to ourselves, but let us do it in the awareness of the grace of God in which we stand!**

For this too is certain from what follows: we could have spared ourselves some of God's chastisements if we had stepped into His light and confessed our failure, our sin, to Him. Why don't we take this path? *“Do not be like a horse, like a mule that has no understanding; with bridle and reins, their ornaments, you must tame them, otherwise they will not come near you. The wicked is in much pain, but goodness will surround him who trusts in the LORD”* (*Psalm 32:9–10*). Indeed, in our case too, it is God's goodness that leads us to repentance!

And because we stand in grace, because it is the goodness of God that deals with us, we do not test ourselves to see whether we can go to the breaking of bread or whether we would be better off staying away. No, we test ourselves to then eat and drink, as it says in our verse: *“And so he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup.”* (*1 Corinthians 11:28*) This is indeed grace, the goodness of God! Of course, it is assumed that one does not persist in evil. However, it is completely incompatible with this grace if a believer, in the face of life's many incidents, asks again and again in fear whether he can go to communion today or not, even though he had confessed everything to the Lord as far as he was aware. Well, let it be said once again: God's Word does not say that I have “boldness” to break bread today and not tomorrow. I should examine myself and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup (*1 Corinthians 11:28*).

So this verse is an extremely blessed encouragement from the Lord for us, His own, to take our place at His table, however shamefully we have often failed. It also shows how keen He is for all His people to come to eat and drink unless someone is excluded by the discipline of the assembly.

Different Types of Judgment

In *1 Corinthians 11:28-32*, four different expressions for “judgment” are mentioned. To make them recognizable, the verses are quoted in context and with verse reference: *1 Corinthians 11:28-32*: *“But let each one examine* [*dokimazo*] *himself, and so let him eat of the loaf and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks unworthily eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning* [*diakrino*] *the body. For this reason, many*

of you are weak and sick, and a good part have fallen asleep. But if we judged [*diakrino*] *ourselves, we would not be judged* [*krino*]. *But if we are judged, we will be chastened* [*paideuo*] *by the Lord, so that we will not be condemned* [*katakrino*] *with the world.”*

1. The first expression is **dokimazo** = “to test, to try”; it occurs in *1 Corinthians 11:28*. We have already spoken about this in connection with self-judgment.
2. The second expression in *1 Corinthians 11:31*, **diakrino** = “to distinguish, to make a difference, to judge”, is closely related to the first expression mentioned in verse 28, indeed it explains vividly how our self-examination should proceed: We must learn to discern in our lives what comes from the Spirit of God or from the flesh, from the Father or from the world, from the Lord Jesus or from the devil. How essential it is for our spiritual condition to discern our motives! That we would be clearer about what comes from above and what comes from below. The same word is also used in *1 Corinthians 11:29*, where it is about discerning the body of the Lord and thus distinguishing between the Lord's Supper and an ordinary meal. We have already dealt with this too.
3. The third expression **krino** = “to judge, to evaluate” occurs in *1 Corinthians 11:31, 32*. Here we learn the serious truth that God does not have to judge us if we do it ourselves. But if we fail to judge ourselves, then He must judge us and, in His wisdom and love, walk with us on paths that hurt us. This is therefore an earthly judgment on the part of the Lord, a chastisement, not eternal judgment. The Christian has escaped this forever. *“Whoever believes in him will not be judged”* (*John 3:18*). *“He who hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life”* (*John 5:24*).
4. The fourth expression in *1 Corinthians 11:32*, **katakrino** = “to condemn” underlines what has been said. The world is heading for sure judgment, eternal damnation. The believer, on the other hand, is not condemned with the world; instead, he is chastened here if necessary. The word for this is **paideuo**, from which our word pedagogue is derived. However serious the chastening is, what an immeasurable difference there is between the chastening of God's children and the condemnation of the world!

Sin unto Death

We have learned that we can participate unworthily in the breaking of bread in two ways: by eating it without distinguishing between the Lord's Supper and an ordinary meal; and by eating it without having examined ourselves first. We have also learned that God will not allow us to eat and drink without judgment. In this case, we eat and drink judgment to ourselves, that is, our eating and drinking at the Lord's supper only leads to God's bringing us under chastening, so that we may realize our condition and not be condemned with the world. The apostle adds the cautionary note: *"Therefore many of you are weak and sick, and a good number have fallen asleep."*

Perhaps the Corinthians had not yet given any thought to why so many brothers and sisters among them were sick and weak and some had fallen asleep. Now the apostle tells them the real reason: their unworthy eating and drinking at the Lord's Supper. **Should it be any different today? But we should definitely be on our guard against the idea that every sickness, every weakness, every death of believers is the result of unjudged sin.** Far from it! In many cases, God pursues quite different purposes in such ways with His own, for example, the testing of their faith, the glorification of Himself, the prevention of evil, and the like. Sometimes God takes away from us precisely those who have not sinned, who were the best among us – perhaps because we no longer listened to them. But this is not what our current scripture is talking about. It is actually about being sick, about the falling asleep of those who had sinned.

I do not doubt that in the case of those who had fallen asleep, it was a case of those who had sinned unto death (*1 John 5:16*). **Their behavior at the Lord's Supper had been so serious and wicked in the eyes of God that He allowed bodily death to come upon them as a consequence.** God tells us through the apostle John that we should not pray for such people. We find another example of sin unto death in Ananias and Sapphira in *Acts 5*.

"Sin unto death" only has to do with bodily death, not with the eternal separation of the soul from God. The question of eternal salvation is not affected by this at all; rather, it is entirely a matter of God's ways with His children, "so that we" – the apostle now includes himself – "may not be condemned with the world". **But should**

these things not be a serious warning to us not to treat the Lord's Supper, or the things of God in general, lightly?

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