

Series: Vision Month 2022

Title: Outreach

Text: 1 Corinthians 11:17-27

Date: February 6, 2022

Most every believer is completely aware that God intends to use His people as witnesses for Him. Jesus was clear on this matter. He told the earliest disciples, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation" (Mark 16:15). The apostles were clear concerning Jesus' words and the church's mission. It is for this reason that Paul instructed first-century believers at Colossae, "Act wisely toward outsiders, making the most of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you should answer each person" (Colossians 4:5-6). Telling others about Jesus was a priority for Jesus and His apostles. Both the book of Acts and the pages of early church history reveal that the first disciples took the Lord's call to evangelism seriously.

Reach Out

Most modern Christians are aware that witnessing and reaching out to unbelievers is important. What is an aspired value, however, is not always an actualized value. One can have a mental awareness that the Lord wants His people to share the gospel while failing to actually do so. I myself find this to be a continual area of struggle and tension. My commitment to witnessing is something I must continually monitor.

How can believers be more active in sharing the faith? In what I share below, I would like to examine Paul's instruction concerning the Lord's Supper. It may seem strange, but the ordinance associated with the bread and the cup provide powerful instruction about the mission of the church. We will see that Jesus' famous meal provides a lot of insight about evangelism. By way of introduction, let's consider four types of witnessing that one can implement before we begin.

Let your light shine. In His famous "Sermon on the Mount," Jesus said, "In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). What did our Lord mean by "light?" When we study Scripture, we find that God is the source of light. At the beginning of time, His first created work centered on the subject. Genesis tells us, "Then God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light" (Genesis 1:3). Not only is God the source of light, but the Bible describes Him in terms of light. Paul said the Lord "lives in unapproachable light" (1 Timothy 6:16). Because of these realities, the truth that comes from God is described as light. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). The Lord, His holy character, and His fixed realities of right and wrong can be likened to marvelous luminosity.

In light of all of these ideas associated with the light of the Lord, believers are called to live in light of the light of God. John said, "If we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). Living in the way John described results in a transformed

life. As one is changed by the light of God, he or she inadvertently shines God's light to others. In a way similar to the way the radiance of the Lord's presence emanated from Moses when he descended from the mountain of God, the Lord can shine His glory through believers who walk with Him. Such is the first step in being a gospel witness.

Be prepared to speak gospel words. The Barna Group, and evangelical research agency, once reported to two primary factors contribute to a lack of witnessing amongst believers – fear and ignorance. Most are afraid to broach the subject of religion with friends and family members. Furthermore, most don't feel adequately prepared concerning what to say. The Scriptures provide a remedy for both. First, the Bible reveals that prayer can be a powerful antidote against the fear associated with evangelism (Acts 4:23-31; Romans 1:17). Second, Peter indicated that the onus is on believers to be prepared to share. He said, "in your hearts regard Christ the Lord as holy, ready at any time to give a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you" (1 Peter 3:15). If you want to be a gospel witness, take personal responsibility to ready yourself to speak gospel words.

Find a platform. When Paul visited the first-century city of Athens, he found an opportune platform for evangelism at the Areopagus (Acts 17:16-34). His witness in that city took place shortly after he had turned a jail cell in Philippi into a pulpit for proclaiming the good news of Jesus (Acts 16:25-34). Learn a lesson from the apostle; there are opportunities to minister the message of Christ all throughout your community. Basketball courts, senior adult centers, workplaces, restaurants, homeless shelters, neighborhood clubs, and the like all can be used as platforms for evangelism.

Get involved in a ministry. How about your local church? There are surely opportunities for evangelism within the gathering of God's people. Both Jesus and Paul provided an example in this regard. They each used the Sabbath day as an opportunity to share the gospel (Mark 6:1-2; Acts 17:1-2). In your local church, you could perhaps find ways to tell others about Jesus through teaching Sunday school, helping with kids or student ministries, or participating in outreach projects.

What the Lord's Supper Teaches Us About Evangelism

When we read Paul's first letter to the church at Corinth, we find clear instructions concerning one of the two ordinances for the New Testament church. The apostle taught the Corinthians about the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 11:23-34. He knew the congregation had some unhealthy practices in regard to the memorial meal, so he wanted to provide apostolic correction (1 Corinthians 11:17-22). Many may not think of the Lord's Supper as an occasion for insight concerning evangelism and outreach. Most certainly, most regard the first ordinance of the church (baptism) as pertaining to that subject. The second ordinance of the church (the Lord's Supper) is often viewed as being more concerned with discipleship. However, a closer look at Jesus' famous meal unearths powerful truth concerning the relation between the meal and the mission of God.

We do the mission of Christ together. The church at Corinth was plagued by division. The apostle commented on this reality at the outset of his epistle (1 Corinthians 1:10-11). When he gave instructions concerning the Lord's Supper, he also remarked on the divided nature of the church (1 Corinthians 11:17-18). In light of the splintered, sectarian spirit amongst the congregation, Paul upheld the Lord's Supper as a potential source of unity. He said, "When you come together, then, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper" (1 Corinthians 11:20). Instead of joining in fellowship to eat of the bread and drink of the cup as the early church did (Acts 2:42), the Corinthians engaged in self-focused forms of religion (1 Corinthians 11:21-22).

Paul's call for unity in the context of his discussion regarding the Lord's Supper enlightens us concerning a fundamental purpose behind the meal. When folks eat together, their act of sharing a meal implies intimacy and oneness. For all of human history, this has been true. Consider the stigma with sharing a meal from the life of Joseph in Egypt (Genesis 43:32). In His divine wisdom, the Lord created a meal for the church (Matthew 26:26-30). One of His intents in the meal was to promote the priority of unity amongst His people.

When it comes to sharing the gospel with others, the Lord's Supper reminds us that there is a unified body the Lord intends to use for His mission. In the very next chapter in Corinthians, Paul would elaborate on this point by speaking of the church as a body (1 Corinthians 12:12). Within the body of Christ, there are various members who all serve various functions (1 Corinthians 12:14-18). If unity is present, the body operates at optimal efficiency, resulting in a great spread of the gospel! The Lord's Supper provides us a powerful picture of the need for oneness in mission and ministry.

We have been changed by Christ. The elements used within the Lord's Supper serve an important purpose. They give an object lesson of gospel truth. Each represents a distinct aspect of Christ's work on behalf of His people. When Jesus instituted His memorial meal, He drew His disciples attention to two elements – bread (1 Corinthians 11:23-24) and the cup (1 Corinthians 11:25).

According to Jesus, the bread was a symbol of His body (Matthew 26:26). In line with Passover custom, the bread served at the first Lord's Supper would have been without leaven, representing the sinlessness of our Lord. It would have been bruised and pierced from the baking process, providing a picture of the way in which Jesus fulfilled prophecies of Isaiah 53:5-6. All in all, the bread was a reminder of how the Messiah gave His body to secure salvation for the bodies of sinners (Hebrews 10:5-10)

The contents of the cup also provided a startling object lesson. The language used in the New Testament referred to it as what has famously been translated "the fruit of the vine." In the first-century world, such wine was sometimes used for cleansing purposes. Consider the account of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:34. The intended imagery with the cup was of cleansing. Jesus wanted His disciples to focus on the way in which His blood would provide freedom and forgiveness of sin.

In God's spiritual economy, blood has always been a symbol of life. Leviticus 17:11 said, "For the life of a creature is in the blood." Why was blood required in God's program of salvation? The answer is simple – the inevitable consequence of sin has

always been death (Genesis 2:15-17; Romans 6:23). In order to be forgiven of sin, a symbol of life was needed. Since blood is the material that carries life-sustaining nutrients throughout the body, it is a fitting symbol for salvation. When the first man and woman transgressed God's Law, blood had to be spilled to provide forgiveness and covering for sin and shame (Genesis 3:21). Since then, God has always required blood for salvation. Scripture says, "According to the law almost everything is purified with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Hebrews 9:22).

All of this truth from the Lord's Supper provides us with powerful truth for missions and evangelism. We are a people with a message to declare. Christ's memorial meal was designed to indelibly engrave the gospel message into the hearts and minds of His people. As we seek to tell others about Jesus, may we remember that we have a message that involves much more than a message about God, church, or moral reform. We have a message about a body and blood. It is only in this message that we have supernatural power that will change hearts and minds (Romans 1:16).

Christ is in us. It is for good reason that the Lord's Supper is physically consumed by participants. Jesus wanted to provide a picture of the intimacy believers have with Him. Eating the bread and drinking the contents of the cup involves a physical ingestion. The act illustrates a glorious reality that takes place at salvation. When one is born again, the Spirit of God comes to live within his or her soul. Such truth is spoken of in passages like John 3:3; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Galatians 3:2; and Ephesians 1:13-14. Just as food goes into the recesses of one's being, Christ dwells in the inside of His children.

Such truth has application for our role in witnessing. When we tell others about Jesus, we have power from the Holy Spirit within us (Acts 1:8). We are not left to our own rhetorical abilities or to tactics of human persuasion. As we speak the words of the gospel, the Spirit of God can change hearts!

We are all preachers. The proclamation of God's truth is often thought of being something reserved for ministers and preachers alone. The Lord's Supper presents a different perspective. When Jesus gave his instructions concerning the memorial meal, he said, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26). The word rendered "proclaim" was used in the New Testament on a number of occasions to speak of the apostles' preaching (Acts 4:2; 13:5, 38; 15:36; 16:17; 17:3, 13, 23; 26:23; 1 Corinthians 9:14; Colossians 1:28). The fact that Paul would use the word of all believers within the church of Corinth is revealing. The Lord's Supper was designed to underscore the fact that every person in the church has a part in preaching the gospel. Every member can serve as a minister and missionary within his or her circle of influence.