

GRACE AT THE TABLE

How the Lord's Supper Gives Us Joy and Confidence

Doctrinal Series
PBC

Texts: Romans 8:29-32; 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Romans 8:29–32 *For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.³¹ What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?*

1 Corinthians 11:23–26 *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,²⁴ 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."²⁵ 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.**"²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, **you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.***

Introduction

Family meals matter. I grew up in a home where our schedules and rhythms allowed our family to gather at our table and share the evening meal. Not every family can do this daily – Beth's and mine did not. But I was privileged as a boy to enjoy something for a season that I have come to greatly appreciate and that shaped important values in my life over time.

Those meals had a rhythm – we would hold hands, and my dad would pray the same prayer each evening. After the meal, he would reach for his well-worn Bible, read a passage in our presence, and conclude with another prayer asking God to bless each of us at the table. For more than 60 years, those mealtime rhythms have continued around his table. If I am honest, I endured many of those rhythms as a boy, hoping the

Scripture would not be long and the prayer of blessing would be short, because I had things to do and places to go. However, the longer I have lived, the more I have come to appreciate them as the immense privilege and blessing they represented: a dad who loved, cared for, and prayed over each of us.

I was with him several weeks ago, possibly for what may have been my last visit before he goes to heaven. As I had done as a boy, I took his hand and listened to his humble, quiet prayer – *“For what we are about to receive, Lord, make us truly thankful. Amen.”* I watched as he opened his Bible and read a portion as he was able. And I held his hand again as he closed our meal with a prayer of blessing on each of us around the table and on those family members who were not present.

So, meals like this are good. ***But some meals are better than others because they rise above the daily needs they are intended to meet.***

These meals are celebratory in nature – birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, extraordinary achievements, Thanksgiving, or Christmas Dinner. While there was blessing and profit in our everyday meals, these meals rose to an entirely different level. And that is what we have experienced this morning as we participated in a meal at a table spread by our Heavenly Father, with His Son as the guest of honor and us as family members invited to share in the celebration.

But I wonder how many of us actually saw what we did this morning as we participated in communion in this light. I suspect most of us did not.

If we are going to improve our sight, we need to deepen our understanding of this important rhythm to our faith and worship. And fortunately, the text we have arrived at in Romans 8:29-32 provides what we need to sharpen our focus, deepen our understanding, and fuel our joy at the gracious invitation we have from God to sit and eat at His table.

I have titled this message “Grace **at** the Table” purposefully. You will note that I did not say “Grace **from** the Table” because this meal is not the source of the kind of meritorious grace that Paul has been talking about in Romans 1-8.

Unlike those who embrace Roman Catholic dogma regarding this meritorious, salvific nature of this meal, we align with what Paul and the apostles consistently teach and insist upon in their inspired writings – that salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in the finished work of Christ alone!

I want to make sure we catch two important theological truths reflected in what I just stated. First, the word “alone” reminds us that the source, means, and grounds of our salvation are external to us – meaning they do not come from us and are not accomplished by any work we do or any religious rite we perform, including participating in communion. Second, the word “finished” means that our salvation has been fully accomplished by Christ and that nothing more needs to be added or accomplished for us or by us in our redemption.

This is important because many religious people believe that eating this bread and drinking this wine meaningfully contributes to the initial procuring or the ongoing sustaining of the forgiveness of sins we need. Put differently, many people think that participating in this rite is a necessary part of how God saves people and sustains that salvation from their sins. Let me cite official Roman Catholic doctrine, so you know that I am not exaggerating or misstating the case:

“Holy Communion separates us from sin. The body of Christ we receive in Holy Communion is “given up for us” and the blood we drink “shed for the many for the forgiveness of sins.” For this reason the Eucharist cannot unite us to Christ without at the same time cleansing us from past sins and preserving us from future sins.” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1392-1395)

As a propitiatory sacrifice . . . the sacrifice of Mass effects the remission of sins and the punishment for sins . . . The Eucharist Sacrifice of propitiation can, as the Council of Trent expressly asserted, be offered, not merely for the living, but also for the poor souls in purgatory.”
(Ludwig Ott, *Fundamentals of Catholic Dogma*, pp. 412-413).

However, if we have been listening carefully to Paul in Romans, it is very clear that this teaching is not only very different from what he has stated, it actually reflects a very different kind of gospel than the one Paul was authorized by God to explain authoritatively to the Church. In fact, this error is so serious, it is actually damnable. Which is why the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to pronounce a divine curse (anathema) on those who propagated or embraced that erroneous gospel, because it wasn't the gospel at all (Galatians 1:6-9)!

This is why I want to insist that, as we participate in this meal, we are really celebrating ***memorialized grace*** rather than receiving meritorious grace from the table.

And to help us see the table for the marvelous invitation it truly is, I want Paul to answer several questions that clarify the nature of the meal we have participated in together.

I. A Gracious Invitation – Who Comes to the Table? (8:29-30)

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

A. Exclusive Invitation – only these people who have been known and called by God!

- Only those who are “in Christ Jesus” (8:1) and who are destined to “share in His glory” (8:17)
- People who have been justified
- People who are being sanctified
- People who have and will be glorified

B. Inclusive Invitation – all of these people!

- The group of people God foreknew (8:29) is the same group that will be glorified (8:30), and this group has been the subject of the entire chapter! No one is left out
- Regardless of Social Status
- Regardless of Ethnic Background
- Regardless of Spiritual Heritage
- Regardless of Present Suffering

In other words, those invited to this meal are the same people we have been reading about in Romans 5-8! And if we have repented of our sins and become fully dependent, wholehearted, lifelong disciples of Jesus (looking to no other for salvation), we are included!

II. A Glorious Celebration – What is the occasion and what are we celebrating? (5 amazing realities that God has done)

*For those whom **he** foreknew **he** also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom **he** predestined **he** also called, and those whom **he** called **he** also justified, and those whom **he** justified **he** also glorified.*

- The nature and feel of this meal are celebratory – we are celebrating something big. This is not an ordinary meal!
- In our context, think of birthdays, anniversaries, Thanksgiving, Christmas dinner, etc.
- So, what exactly are we celebrating? We are celebrating a monumental thing that God has done for us, and it has five astonishing components that we have and are experiencing:

A. The Inexplicable Love of God – foreknowledge means having an experiential relationship marked by love and loyalty.

B. The Sovereign Purpose of God – predestined to be conformed internally and transformed externally into the likeness of His Son.

C. The Gracious Call of God – called (summoned) by God to experience His saving grace and to partner in His mission to bring many sons to glory, so that His Son would be the “firstborn” among many!

D. The Saving Grace of God – justification by grace alone, through faith alone, in the finished Work of Christ alone, as the free gift of God, not as the reward for spiritual merit we have achieved, or as compensation for good works we have done.

E. The Ongoing, Unstoppable Work of God – Glorification. Once God began the process with foreknowledge, it cannot be interrupted or diverted without assailing His character or undermining His credibility. God’s nature and God’s name rest on His bringing to full completion what He started in us! And He will do this on the Day when Jesus Christ appears in Glory.

III. An Irrevocable Foundation – On what basis do we have a seat at this table? (8:31-32)

If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

A. God’s Indescribable Love for us

- God did not spare His Son – He did not withhold Him from us.

B. God’s Unimaginable Sacrifice for Us

- God gave up His Son for us all – gave Him up as our Substitute – as a voluntary, vicarious, violent, acceptable sacrifice in our place.

IV. Divine Expectations – what is expected of me as I come to the table?

1 Corinthians 10:14–17 Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. ¹⁵ I speak as to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. ¹⁶ The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? ¹⁷ Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

Here are four simple, but important expectations the NT writers expect of each of us as we come to this table and participate in this meal:

- A. That I Truly Belong to Christ;***
- B. That I am in Unrestrained Fellowship with Christ;***
- C. That I come to this table in a worthy manner – with holy awe and joyful gratitude;***
- D. That I embrace the implications of what it means to participate in the holy nature of this meal.***

V. Spiritual Identification – what is the nature of what we are doing at the table? (Memorial or Sacrament)

A. Prefigured in the Old Testament

- Ex 24:1-11 – the reason for the meal was the establishment of a gracious covenant;
- Deut. 14:23, 26 – describe the intent of the meal – joyful celebration with/in the presence of God
- Passover looked back on God’s saving deliverance at the Exodus and looked forward to the coming of the Messiah and the new and better exodus He will bring about as One greater than Moses.

B. Jesus Announced and Explained

- Announced: Matt 26:20-30; Mark 14:17-26; Luke 22:14-23;
- Explained: John 6:53-57 points us to the reality that only those who have fully embraced Jesus (believed in him) will have a place at this table in the future.

C. The Apostles Initiated (Acts 2:42)

D. Paul Corrects and Interprets

- 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 – don’t abuse it because it isn’t intended for your personal satisfaction or physical needs; it is a confessional proclamation.
- 1 Cor 10:16 – Paul explains that our participation/fellowship in this meal was established by what happened when we embraced Christ intimately and personally, turning from idolatry to serve

the true and living God and to wait for the coming of His Son from heaven (1 Thess 1:9-10).

This meal points us back to the establishment and completion of the Old Covenant that God made with His people (Exodus and Passover), which looked forward to the hope of the coming of One who would establish and complete a new and better Covenant between God and His people.

It points us to the marvelous news that this New Covenant has been established by Jesus at His first coming and will be fully accomplished by Him at His Second Coming.

This is why Jesus inaugurated this meal at His final Passover meal on earth and said that the next time we would eat and drink in this way would be at a feast that celebrates and marks the arrival and establishment of a New Creation.

And this meal we observe regularly is a small but important foretaste of that great banquet to which we are all invited and will one day share in!

VI. Personal Ramifications: What are the effects of this table?

- A.** Confident Assurance that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (8:1).
- B.** Triumphant Endurance because there will be no separation from God who has called and is glorifying His people by using all things to conform them to the glorious likeness of His Son!

Conclusion: *How Should We Respond to this Teaching (8:31-32)?*

1. *What should we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?*

As we come to the table, we should rehearse certain gospel realities that have happened to us so that they produce two things in us:

- Gospel-based Reassurance (Confident Assurance) that there is no condemnation, as we reflect on what He did for us at His first coming, His death on the Cross.
- Gospel-fueled Reinvigoration (Triumphant Endurance) that there will be no separation, because we look forward to what He promised to do for us at His second coming in glory.

2. *Why should we believe these things?*

"He who did not spare His own Son but gave Him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"

Meals like this are intended to provide strength for daily living, which is why we need to rehearse certain truths in our hearts when we come to this table.

Meals like this are also intended to celebrate certain realities that produce deep joy and hope for the future. This is why we need to believe the things that this table represents and to "proclaim" (announce them) till He comes for us.