

February 28

How Not to Take Holy Communion

Part 2 – The Rx of Redemption

As for me, I said, “O Lord, be gracious to me; Heal my soul, for I have sinned against You.” (Ps. 41:4)

Somewhat shockingly, St. Paul said, **“But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse.”** (I Corinthians 11:17)

Apparently, in some situations, a person (or people) would be better **not** taking communion, than taking it!

A helpful clarification about the words “better/worse”: St. Paul used two words that rhymed. The first, “better,” meant “stronger.” The second, “worse,” meant “weaker.”

Think about the things that have made you weaker or stronger in body, your relationships, or your own self-reflection (seeing yourself clearly or not).

When you don’t eat, you, of course, make yourself weaker. When you eat food that is not healthy, you make yourself weaker over the long run. When I harbor resentment toward someone on a regular basis, it becomes corrosive, both to the relationship, and to my own soul. I become weaker, and the relationship becomes weaker.

When I take a good look at myself – as I’m reflected in God’s “mirror” (His second use of the Commandments), I am almost always condemned because I have fallen short of what God expects. Am I weaker for this, or stronger?

Here is where we need God’s Word clearly applied, perhaps through a pastor or elder, to weigh in on what’s happening in our soul. Historically, German Lutheran pastors were oftentimes called “seelsorger,” soul healers. They fulfilled this position primarily in one way, by determining which people needed more: the Law to hold them accountable for sin they do not see *or* the Gospel if the law had broken the heart, so that they needed forgiveness through faith in Christ.

Certainly, this can be done independent of a pastor or an elder. But brutal honesty and the diagnostic guide of Scripture are needed. A verse that might help us in this diagnostic work is *Psalms 42:11a* – “*Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me?*” We need to know the “why.”

It is difficult to be our own counselor. If you answer the above question from Psalm 42 with “I am in despair because I’m feeling guilty, lonely, despondent...” The sacrament should be prescribed. You need forgiveness. You need strength.

On occasion, you may notice that some people do not go to Communion who typically take Communion. Possibly, they have diagnosed themselves as being unrepentant. Or maybe the pastor has told them they should not take Communion this week because of persistent unrepentant sin. (Such instruction is part of a pastor’s job as steward of the sacrament.) In these situations, the sacrament is not prescribed because potential partakers are not broken, they are unaware of their spiritual sickness, and they are not seeing their need for the Rx of Redemption.

Prayer: *Lord, You have said “A broken and contrite heart You will not despise, O Lord.” May I be broken by Your Law, so that I may see my sickness and receive You and Your medicine of mercy at the Holy Supper. In Your Name I pray. Amen.*