

1 Corinthians 11:28 - Self-examination

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[0 : 0 0] Well tonight I'd like us to turn back to the passage that we read in 1 Corinthians chapter 11 and we're going to especially focus on the words of verse 28. Let a person examine himself then and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. And in particular as I'm sure you've seen from the bulletin we're going to focus on the question of self-examination. Now in this chapter Paul is addressing some of the problems that have arisen in the worship services of the Corinthians. In the first half of the chapter he talks about head coverings and in doing so he is addressing the issue of appropriate conduct for men and women in public worship and in relation to one another.

Paul is addressing something that has obviously arisen in the congregation there and he is highlighting the fact that whilst on the one hand men and women are equal and mutually independent, interdependent which he highlights in verses 11 to 12, he is the same time highlighting the fact that they are different and therefore the women are not to dress or behave in a way that might undermine the place of their husbands in the society in which they live. It seems to be the case that the women were obviously doing something behaving in a way that was undermining their husbands. Perhaps they were pushing themselves forward wanting to appear in the same way as their husbands were appearing and Paul is saying worship is to be orderly and appropriate. It's not about putting ourselves first, it's not about trying to exalt our own status and it's that principle of mutual respect and dignity which has been highlighted here in the chapter. Obviously over the years some people have viewed this as an instruction to maintain a head covering for women and there's absolutely nothing wrong with doing that but the general held view and my own view is that it's the principle that's being applied here, not so much the specific instruction in the sense that in current head coverings and had particularly sensitive overtones in terms of the context of that city. But anyway I don't want to dwell on that because it's the second half of the chapter that we focus on and it's really the second half of the chapter that Paul is more concerned with because in terms of head coverings he seems to be giving some general guidance.

In terms of the Lord's supper he is giving him a fairly sharp rebuke and as we read Paul is appalled at the disorder, division and selfishness that is being displayed in the way the Corinthian church were sharing in the Lord's supper. The people were coming, they were putting themselves first, they weren't waiting for each other, they weren't being considered for one another. In those days it was common to have a meal together like a big congregational meal which then included the Lord's supper and that was to be something that was to be shared together where everyone, whatever status in society was you could share and enjoy together but here in Corinth people are rushing ahead, people are just looking after themselves and they are humiliating people who are less well off. Paul says no, none of that is acceptable and he highlights to them and reminds them what

Christ himself has commanded regarding the Lord's supper and the main point that he is making is that we must not be casual about the Lord's supper and that of course is still a very relevant warning to us all. In every aspect of our worship it's all too easy to just kind of go through the motions, to not really think about what we're doing and just to be getting a bit casual. Paul warns against this kind of unworthy approach to worship and in particular to the Lord's supper and then he gives us the remedy that we need. The solution for avoiding this kind of casualness is to make sure we engage in self-examination. That's what he says, whoever therefore eats this bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord and then he gives us the instruction to deal with this problem. Let a person examine himself then and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. So self-examination really really important when it comes to the Lord's supper and when we hear those words self-examination we tend to perhaps think of the fact that we are to look at our lives, we think about our habits, we reflect on our growth, we acknowledge our mistakes and we see in ourselves where we've gone wrong and perhaps more than anything else we are conscious of our sin and our weakness and that's a very healthy, a very appropriate thing to do to examine our walk and to see how things are, to thank God for how he's kept us and to ask God to forgive us for the ways in which we have wondered. That's certainly what I tend to think about when it comes to self-examination and I'm sure that most of you are the same. But tonight I want to think about self-examination on a much bigger scale, a much much bigger scale and we are going to ask the big question as a Christian, if you are a Christian or if you become one, as Christians what are we?

If you examine yourself what is it that you see? Of course there's a lot that we could say and I'm just going to highlight a few things but they're all going to be very brief. We'll work through them one by one, several things, I'm not going to tell you how many because that will make you feel like you'll be here till midnight. A few things but briefly we will look at each one. If you examine yourself what do you see? Well first of all you'll see that you are made by God. That's the first thing that the Bible teaches us about humanity. We are created by God, every one of us. As Paul says in verse 12 of this chapter, all things are from God. Ultimately whether we are men or women we all have our origin from the God who has made us and back in Genesis 1 and 2 we have this amazing description of God's creation of the universe which includes you and me as humans.

[7 : 55] We are made by God. That means that whenever you look at yourself, whenever you examine yourself even though you might not feel like it, you are the workmanship of God. You look at your hands, you look at your fingerprint, you look at your joints, your skin, your bones, your body, that's God's workmanship. And we marvel at great works of art don't we? We are impressed by the tremendous feats of engineering. We are captivated by beautiful music. All of these things make us say wow but we should never forget that all of these things are the products of the greatest work of art, the most sophisticated machine and the most imaginative being in the universe. The human race, you. So even though we're often aware of our weakness and limitations, step one of self-examination should involve recognising the fact that we've been made by God. And that's of course why we should care for our bodies and our minds and seek to thank the God who made us and sustains us.

This reminds us of something that we mentioned in the morning, the whole question of our world view. We spoke about this in the morning, our world view is incredibly important and our world view, if we are made by God, our world view should be grounded on the creator-creation distinction.

We had this diagram in the morning, same again tonight. God is creator, the entire universe is in that bottom circle, it is created by him, we are part of that. We are made by God.

But not only are we made by God, we are made like God. If you go back to Genesis 1 again, the creation of humanity is the climax of God's creative work. If you read it, I'm sure you're aware of this, at each stage God says that it's good. He says it's good when the land and the sea and the sun and the moon and the stars and all of these things are made. It's good, it's good, it's good. But when humanity is made, creation is very good. It's the climax of creation. And that biblical truth is backed up by our experience. Because whilst we value every aspect of creation, whilst everybody on the planet values the creation, there is a special value placed on human life.

And that's the evidence of that is clear. We were praying for the NHS. We don't have an NHS for plants. We don't have a pension system for animals. We don't have a remembrance day for machinery.

[11 : 19] People are different. There is something special and distinctive about humanity. And the Bible is the place where we find the reason for that. A non-biblical worldview struggles to explain this, but the Bible makes it absolutely clear. The reason humanity is special, the reason we know humanity is special is because God not only made us, he made us in his image. That means quite simply that we resemble God and we represent God in our nature. And that is incredibly important because there is a big difference between being made by and being made like. There's a big difference.

The whole universe is made by God. Only humanity is made like God and in his image.

Now, I'm sure that you have all probably known that since you were children, but again we should stop and grasp the significance of this because look at yourself, examine yourself, look at the person beside you. As you do that, you are seeing something of God. Now, that's not to say that there isn't a lot in us that does not resemble God. We are sinners and we know that and we'll come to that in a minute. But the fact that we are not perfectly resembling God does not mean that the image of God has been completely obliterated from us. Despite our failures, we still bear his image.

And bearing God's image is an amazing, wonderful privilege. That's what makes humanity so remarkable. You think of the amazing achievements of humanity. You think of the stunning creativity of art and music and architecture. All these things that you look at them and you think, wow, how did anybody do that? You think of the order and logic of engineering and construction. You think of something like the Queensferry Crossing. Unbelievable engineering that people can make that, design it, build it, and make it function. You think of the genius of scientists and mathematicians who explain to us the intricacies of how the world functions. You think of the outstanding compassion of people who put other needs before their own. None of these things are animal instincts.

None of them. They are the evidence of the fact that we are made like God. Bearing God's image is an amazing privilege. But it's not just an amazing blessing. It is also a great responsibility.

[14 : 47] Indeed, part of the dignity of being human is that we are responsible for our actions.

And that is something that is all too often forgotten, too easily forgotten, because we live in an age where there's probably a lot of people who will say, we're just animals. People will say that, we're just sophisticated animals. And we all just come from a series of just natural processes that can be explained on entirely scientific terms. We are simply just animals. But that, like every other non-biblical worldview, does not work. Because if you went to the High Court, where you saw a man in the dock charged with rape, if he stood up and said, I'm just an animal, would that excuse his actions? Of course it wouldn't. Because humans are not just animals. We are made in the image of God, and we carry the privilege and the responsibility that that brings. So you are made like God.

And of course that means that so is absolutely everybody who is on this planet. And that is the reminder of how precious other people are. We live in an age where people like to claim that that equality is this astounding virtue that we must all seek to emulate. That's true. Equality is a wonderful thing. But the ground of equality is the fact that we are all made in the image of God.

Everybody, absolutely everybody is so precious. And I don't know about you, but I wish that the British media would remember that. Next time 300 people are blown up in Somalia or Iraq. And it barely gets mentioned. We're made like God. So we're examining ourselves. What do we see? We see that we are made by God. That is amazing. We see that we are made like God. That's even more amazing.

But most amazing of all is the fact that we are made for God. God has not simply made us to leave us to function like some kind of machine that he has invented. We are not made by an impersonal God or force or series of events. We are made by the personal God who himself dwells in the eternal harmony and fellowship of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We have been made by God so that we might be his. You're made for God. You are made for God. Every non biblical worldview will ultimately come to the conclusion you're made for nothing. The Bible says you're made for God. And that's the amazing covenant goal that we have running right through scripture where God says you will be my people and I will be your God. That is what God wants for every single one of us. And so just examine yourself and think about that. Think about God and all of his power and glory and majesty and strength and then think of these amazing truths. I am made by him. I'm made like him.

[18 : 44] I am made for him. And if you lack self worth, if you lack self esteem, if you feel like a failure, if you feel like a waste of space, then you need to write these words on your heart. Because God wants you made. God wants you like him and God wants you with him in a wonderful covenant relationship.

These are the foundational truths of humanity. These three things made by God, made like God, made for God. And it's so interesting. People will say, they'll often say, look within yourself to find meaning to life in the sense that if you just look within, you will find meaning and explanation.

And of course, without the Bible, that's just kind of empty optimism. But if you have a biblical worldview, that is actually true. If you don't have God, you're going to look inside yourself and find that you're ultimately meaningless, purposeless, and hopeless. But if we examine ourselves from a biblical perspective, we discover glimpses of the glorious God, who is our creator and our sustainer.

If you examine yourself, you're going to see something incredibly special. And it's all because of God.

However, we all know that when we examine ourselves, not everything that we see is good. And that is because after the wonderful creative work of Genesis one and two, we find the destructive work of the serpent and the devastating actions of humanity, wherein we sinned against God. That brings us to the next thing that we are. We are sinners against God. And when we examine ourselves, we see that along with being in the image of God, we also display so much that is ungodly. And that's particularly through when we realize that in the Bible, God reveals his law to us. And despite what people may think, God's law is not a restrictive controlling regime of some cold tyrannical deity.

[21 : 34] God's law is his loving guidelines, the guidelines and instructions of our creator. He reveals to us what he is like. He reveals to us what he expects and wants in us and from us. In his law, he is guiding us as to how we should be. And that, of course, makes perfect sense. If we are made by God, like God and for God, then the only way to fulfill our potential is to listen to God and to follow what he wants us to do. And that's why it is an obedience to God's law that we find through freedom. And disobedience brings not freedom, but slavery. Obeying God's law is simply following out the logic of the fact that we are made by him, made like him and made for him. People think that if you disobey God's law, if you abandon the

Bible and if you ignore God, that's where you find freedom. It is one of the devil's biggest lies. And a very good illustration of this is a steam train. Imagine a steam train, a big, powerful steam train, a stunning work of strength, ability, majesty and creativity.

As you probably guessed, I like steam trains. They're very cool. They are very, very cool. But where is it that a steam train is fulfilling all of its potential? Where is it?

Well, it's when it's powering down the tracks, roaring through the countryside, blasting on with steam belt, you get like I just pictured it's amazing, stunning picture.

That is when a steam train is fulfilling all of its potentials when it's flying down these tracks. But what happens if you take it off the rails? All of a sudden, it becomes weak, incapable and a poor shadow of what it is really meant to be.

[24 : 00] And exactly the same is true of us. We are made to follow the path that God has given to us. God's law is like the tracks that a steam train is meant and designed to go on. The steam train can fly down the tracks because one is designed for the other.

And we are the same with God's law. God has made us, God has made his law, the two go together. That is where everything works. That is where we find freedom. That is where we fulfill our potential.

And if we come off the rails, we very, very quickly get stuck. But if we examine ourselves, we see that we are all guilty in this area. If we take God's law as the criterion for self-examination, there is only one result. We can only conclude that we are sinners against God. And the evidence of that is everywhere, from the behaviour of nation-states to the sinfulness of our own hearts. And the effect of that sin is devastating, broken lives, broken relationships, broken hearts, broken people. But ultimately, our sin is not against one another.

Ultimately, our sin is against God. We are God's creation made by him, like him and for him. It is God's law that we disobey. And it is the God-given responsibility that he is given to us that we are failing to fulfill. And the result of that is that our relationship with God is broken.

We are alienated from him. We are rebelling against him. And we have fallen away from what we are meant to be. And the result is that we're lost without God. As we read in Isaiah at the beginning, all we, like sheep, have gone astray. We've turned everyone to his own way. That's sounding a very, very vivid image of what humanity has done. Instead of following God's way, we have gone our own way.

[26 : 17] And the result of going our own way is that we now find ourselves lost. Humanity is lost without God. Now, of course, not everybody agrees with that. But again, simple common sense tells us that you always become lost before you realize that you are lost. And from a biblical point of view, it's all very logical. We're made by God, for God, like God. We have rebelled against him.

And we've therefore alienated ourselves from the one who is the source of all meaning, purpose, and coherence in our lives. We are lost without God. And again, real life absolutely backs this up completely. Because what do you do if you're lost? You try to find your way. And if you look out at the world of 2017, you will find countless numbers of people trying to find their way, trying to find meaning, trying to find peace, trying to find that thing that they know is missing.

And that's because without God, we are lost. So if we're made by God, if we're made like God, if we're made for God, if we have sinned against God, and if we are lost without God, what's the answer? What do we need? Well, it's very simple. We desperately need God. And so as we examine ourselves, we see glimpses of what we were meant to be, but we see the reality of what we actually are, and we also see the urgency of what we need. This is the great plight of humanity. We desperately need a relationship with God to be restored. But we are powerless, absolutely powerless to get ourselves out of that situation on our own. We examine ourselves, we see that we've come short, and we ask ourselves the question, what do we need? And more than anything else, we need God.

The absolutely amazing thing about the Bible is that it is not telling us that we can get back to God. The Bible has seen us that God has come to get us. And that great work of salvation that God has done, initiated in the aftermath of the fall, promised and foreshadowed through the Old Testament, and fulfilled and accomplished in the coming of Jesus Christ in the new covenant era, that great work of salvation is done by the God who knows that we desperately, desperately need Him. And so if you're a Christian or if you become one which you can, you absolutely can, then the downward fall from what we were meant to be is not the whole story, because as you examine yourself, you are going to see that there are many, many, many wonderful things that God has done, and your status is being absolutely transformed. So we're desperately needing God, but if our faith is in Jesus Christ, then we are redeemed by God. That means that He has brought you back out of slavery. He has freed you from bondage. He's rescued you from your plight.

He has saved you from your sins. That's the great triumph of the cross that people like you, people like me, sinners, can be saved. Every one of you can be saved because of the great triumph of the cross. Jesus has brought redemption for sinners. It's the great triumph of the cross, but it is also the great cost of the cross, because our redemption came at the cost of Jesus dying to pay our ransom. So as you examine yourself, what do you see? You see someone who has been redeemed, set free from all the awfulness of sin and its power, and you also see someone whose redemption has come at an immense cost. And that tells you how precious and valuable you are to God.

[31 : 28] You're redeemed by Him. But God has not simply redeemed us so that we can stand independently. He has redeemed us and united us to Himself in Jesus Christ. That's the great doctrine of union with Christ, which Paul refers to again and again and again. It really is the main doctrine of the New Testament. If you were to ask, what's the one main doctrine throughout the New Testament? Then I know there's lots of things that you could say, but really union with Christ is one of the...

It is the main doctrine. I'm just saying it is. It really is. It's everywhere. At the heart of the Christian message is union with Christ. By faith, we are united to Christ, united to God the Son.

That's why Paul always refers to Christians as those who are in Christ. And union with Christ means that we participate in and benefit from everything that he has done. So when he died for sin, it was our sin that he was dying for. When he paid a ransom, it was our debt. When he crushed Satan, it was to set us free. When he was sacrificed, it was in our place. When he rose again, it was to give us life. And now there is no condemnation and no separation for all those who are united to God in Jesus Christ. And so if you examine yourself just now, you are seeing a redeemed sinner who is unbreakably united to Jesus. We're made by God, made like God, made for God. And in

Christ we're united to him. We enjoy this amazing union and fellowship with him. But that's not all.

Not only does God redeem us so that we're no longer slaves, not only does God unite us to himself so that we can never be lost again, but he even comes to dwell in your heart by the Holy Spirit. That means that as Christians, we are indwelt by God. So as you examine yourself, what do you see? What do you see? You see the place where God dwells. Or as Paul would say, you see the temple of God. That is amazing that you are the place. I am the place where God dwells.

[34 : 27] We were made by God, made like God, made for God, but we've sinned against him. We were lost without him. We were desperately need of him. But the God who you and I desperately need has not let us down.

He has redeemed us. He's united us to himself and he's even come to dwell in your heart. That is the guarantee of your salvation. That's what the New Testament describes the Holy Spirit as, the guarantee of the fact that you are saved. And it's highlighting the fact that you can never, ever, ever be apart from the God that you desperately need. You see that? Go back three points. You desperately need God.

Come down to the bottom. You are indwelt by God. And that's the ultimate fulfilment of God's promise that he will never leave you nor forsake you. And so our self-examination, yes, it reveals what we were meant to be. Yes, it reveals that we have sinned and failed and things have gone wrong. But it also reveals that an extraordinary transformation has taken place in our situation.

That for all those who have their trust in Jesus Christ or all those who do or will put their trust in Jesus Christ, everything is changed. And it's God who does it all. But it doesn't stop there.

Because as you examine yourself, there is more for you to see. You are also transformed by God. As we said during our study on the fruit of the Spirit earlier this year, the presence of the Holy Spirit in our lives makes an amazing difference. God is dwelling in you and he's doing a work of renovation, sanctifying you, restoring you back to the image of Christ so that you are being made back into what you were originally meant to be. And so although we examine ourselves and although as we do so we see things that we wish weren't there, we must never forget that what you are now is not what you were. By God's amazing grace, we all with unveiled faces beholding the glory of God are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit. You were God's workmanship when you were first created and you are still God's workmanship now as he restores you back to what you were created to be.

[37 : 13] God made us to be like him. He is now sanctifying us to remake us like him. That of course means that we are no longer living for ourselves, we are living for God. We are made by God, we are made for God and now that we have been saved and restored instead of living against God, we are living for him. And that's really what lies at the heart of self-examination.

You examine yourself, you ask the question, what am I for? What are you for? What are you all for? What are you all for? What is the point in any of you? What am I for? The answer is that you are for God and that's why we want to live for him in every part of our lives, our homes, our hobbies, our work, our private life, our public life. It is all to please the God for whom we were made.

And of course that's why when we see things in our lives that shouldn't be there, we need to repent, we need to turn away from it, we need to pray that God would lead us not into temptation and enable us to follow his ways and do what he wants. But of course living for God is not easy, especially when the rest of the world is in rebellion against God. But as you examine yourself right now sitting here at the Lord's table, what's the most obvious thing of all?

The most obvious thing of all is that you are here, but the reason you are here is because you're kept by God.

The covenant God has promised that he will be your God and you will be his people. You're made by God, made for God and so he is keeping you until he brings you home. And for that reason we're waiting for God.

[39 : 21] We were once lost and broken, but now we have been redeemed and restored, we've been transformed by the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. We are being remade by God, he is making us like him and the reason he's doing that is because ultimately we have been made for him. Our destiny is to be with him as his people, forever enjoying the amazing privilege of being all that God wants us to be as we dwell with him in the new creation. Have you ever thought of that? That you will be God's delight when you go to be with him. When he takes you home, he'll make you everything that he wants you to be. And for that reason we are waiting for God, waiting for that day when he will bring us home. And that means that for now and for all eternity we are and we will be worshipers of God.

He is our God, we are his people. As you examine yourself you are looking at a worshiper of God, a worshiper of the God who is worthy of all our worship. You're made by God, made like God, made for God. You're a sinner against God, you are lost without God, you're desperately needing God, you're redeemed by God, you're united to God, you're indwelt by God, you're transformed by God, you're living for God, you're kept by God, you're waiting for God, you're worshiper of God. As you examine yourself you see all of these things but last of all as you examine yourself you are seeing someone who is loved by God, loved by God. You might ask how can I know, how can I be sure? You can be sure because he died for you. You are all of these things. As you examine yourself that's what you should be seeing because every Christian is these things and every person who trusts in Jesus, even if you're not sitting at the table, if you are trusting in Jesus then you are all of these things too. And if you are not yet a Christian you can be all of these things, you can be all of these things and you know there's 15 things listed there, they are just a glimpse, just a glimpse of all the amazing things that come when we trust in Jesus. We examine ourselves and we make amazing discoveries. But I want to close by highlighting one really important point. All 15 of these things are reasons to come to the Lord's table. We are made by God therefore we come to his table because we are his. We are made like God so we want to follow Christ's example and in coming to the Lord's table we are following the example that he has given to us. We are made for God and we want to obey him and it is out of obedience that we come and sit at his table. We are sinners against God so we come to his table in repentance and in sorrow for our sin. We are lost without God so we don't want to stay away, we want to come and be where he wants us to be. We desperately need God so we come to the Lord's table for communion with him. We are redeemed by God and we are here at the Lord's table to remember the price that was paid for our redemption, the body that was broken and the blood that was shed by Jesus Christ. We are united to God in a beautiful covenant relationship and we celebrate that covenant relationship. As Jesus said, this cup is the cup of the new covenant in my blood. We are indwelt by God which is why he is present here with us at the supper. We are transformed by God so he nourishes us and feeds us as we come and sit around his table. We are living for God which is why at the Lord's table we proclaim to the world the Lord's death. We are kept by God and so as often as we eat and drink regularly again and again and again throughout our lifetime we come back to the table because we are continuing on by God's grace. We are being kept by him. We are waiting for God so we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. We are worshipers of God so we come in thanksgiving to the God who has been so good to us and we are loved by God and because of

his amazing love and the amazing work that he has done in our lives we come and sit at his table to declare to him that we love him too. That is why Paul does not say examine yourself and stay away if you don't match up. He says, let a person examine himself then and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. As you examine yourself you see all the amazing truths of Christian theology and every one of these is a reason for us to sit at his table to eat of the bread and to drink of the cup. Your self-examination can often be seen as a maybe a slightly discouraging process. Really it should make us just rejoice in all that God has done for you and for me.

Let's pray. God our Father we rejoice in all that you have done for us. Everything that you are, everything that you have done we are totally dependent on you and we come now Lord to the Lord's supper with with thankfulness, with such thankfulness for all that you have done aware that we are not here because of ourselves. We are here because of you and we know Lord that at the heart of that is the saving work of Jesus Christ on the cross. We thank you that he gave his life so that we might be saved and so we pray Lord that you would nourish us and teach us and minister to us and bless us as we gather round your table just now. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.