



Teaching on the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:17-34)

In the previous lesson in 1 Cor. 11:2-16 Paul provided a commendation. In verse 17 he moves to a new topic and says in this instruction I have no commendation. Then he writes what are some of the saddest words in the New Testament concerning the church when he says, ***“when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse.”***

What a terrible and discouraging thing to say to a church . . . *“Your meetings do more harm than good.”* Yet their lack of unity and misuse of the Lord's Supper harmed the church and their witness in the world.

I. A Lack of Unity Makes the Meetings of a Church Harmful (vss. 17-19)

In verse 18 Paul addresses the Corinthians, ***“when you come together as a church.”*** Christians are “the church” all the time, but there are times of public assembly. The specific occasion of the meeting in the church at Corinth was the Lord's Supper which is our primary purpose for gathering on the Lord's Day (Acts 20:7). The Lord's Supper should be a time of unity, but in Corinth it was not. Later on in verse 29 Paul says that anyone who partakes of the Lord's Supper without discerning the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.

The church is the body of Christ. When a person shares in the Lord's Supper without considering Jesus and without considering the church they are in error. The Lord's Supper should be a time of unity instead of a time of disunity.



In Corinth there were divisions in the church. The Greek word for division is *schismata* from which we get the English word schism. We discussed this problem early in 1 Corinthians as the church had divided up into factions. In 1 Corinthians 11, we begin to see division on financial or social grounds. Paul says that those who are genuine will be seen through the factionalism.

1. What should make the Lord's Supper a time of unity within the church?

II. A Lack of Consideration of Others Makes the Meetings of a Church Harmful (vss. 20-23)

It is important that we set the context in this passage. It was the Lord's Supper that was involved in this controversy, but Paul tells the Corinthians that they were not even eating the Lord's Supper because of their thoughtlessness. In Corinth, the Lord's Supper was the climax of a combined meal the Christians shared before the Lord's Supper. This dinner or feast is sometimes known as the *Agape* meal. This was a first century pot-luck as members brought food to share amongst themselves.



There was nothing wrong with sharing the Lord's Supper in the context of a meal. In fact, it was during a meal that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper in the upper room. The problem with this meal was that the wealthier members were eating the best of foods and eating in abundance. While some were gorging themselves, others were going hungry. The wealthy were even starting their meal before the poorer Christians even arrived.

The problem with getting drunk at the meal was also addressed here by Paul. Not only were some of the wealthier Christians inconsiderate of others, they actually drank to the point of intoxication. In this state it would be impossible to share properly in the Lord's Supper.

2. How can Christians today be inconsiderate of brothers and sisters in Christ?

3. What four questions does Paul ask the Corinthians in verse 22?

4. Some have taken Paul's rebuke to the Corinthians that they had houses to eat and drink in to prohibit eat together as a church. Is this what he is teaching? Explain your answer.

5. What would it mean to "despise the church of God? (vs. 22)

6. Explain why those who had nothing would be humiliated? (vs. 22)

III. Remembering the Life and Death of Jesus (vss. 23-26)

The Apostle Paul "received" the instruction about the Lord's Supper from the Lord himself and he had "delivered" this instruction to the Corinthians. In the Upper Room Jesus shared His Last Supper with his disciples. This event is recorded in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. This meal came shortly before Jesus was tried and executed. What Jesus provided for His disciples was a concrete and tangible way to regularly remember Him.



Jesus gives them two specific elements to use to remember Him. The first was unleavened bread which was used to remember His Body. With the bread, he broke it symbolising his life that was broken by death, his separation from the Father, and that all those who partake are sharing in his one body. Though it was common for those who were crucified to have broken bones we know that Jesus did not (John 19:33,36). When Jesus instructs his followers to remember His body, He means more than just his flesh and bone; He wants them to remember His very life; all that He did and all that He said.

7. Describe what each phrase means in verse 24: "This is my body;" "which is for you;" do this in remembrance of me.

The second element was the cup which was utilised to remember the blood of Jesus. Before consuming the bread and the cup, Jesus gave thanks. When believers partake of the cup they are reminded of Christ's blood that was shed to provide redemption for man.

His blood brought about the new covenant according to verse 25. A covenant is a promise or a contract or a testament. In this case, it the Christian age in which man can receive forgiveness through the shed blood of Jesus. The Law of Moses passed away when Jesus died, paid for the sin of man with his blood, and rose again.

Please notice the most beautiful words in verse 24, this sacrifice is ***“for you.”*** This sacrifice is for YOU and it is for ME. it would not be inappropriate to insert your own name there. This is my body, this is my blood which is for _____.

The Lord's Supper is to be proclaimed until the Lord comes again. These verses shake us from any possibility of partaking of the Lord's Supper in a casual manner. We are proclaiming the Lord's death when we share in this meal. We are saying to ourselves all those around that the death of Jesus Christ is not something that we will forget. More than at any other time in our week our minds are centrally focused on the fact that the death of Jesus Christ provides the opportunity for our redemption. Further, we are saying that we believe that Jesus is coming again just as he promised.



The frequency of the Lord's Supper is not directly discussed here, but simply the phrase “for as often...” is used in verse 26. No place in the pages of the Bible are we directly told how often to share in the Lord's Supper. We make our decision to meet around the Lord's Table on a weekly basis because that is what was done in the churches in the New Testament.

8. Since the first century church took the Lord's Supper weekly, why would Christians today wish to partake less often?

IV. Remembering Fellow Christians (vss. 26-34)

When we read **verses 27-34** in context, it becomes clear that the Lord expects Christians to remember each other when sharing the Lord's Supper. Verse 29 teaches that eating and drinking of the Lord's Supper without recognising the body, brings judgment. The context of the entire chapter makes it clear that the body of Christ in question here, is the church.

We are to remember each other, as well as Jesus when we share this supper. Verses 17-22 tells us that there was a major problem surrounding the Lord's Supper in Corinth. The people were making a mockery of the *agape* meal and the Lord's Supper by neglecting to remember each other. Because of this **verse 17** says one of the most damning things that can be said to a church, “... ***when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse.***”

The Lord's Supper was designed as a time of unity. **1 Cor. 10:17** reminds us, “***Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.***” As Christians we are taught to pray alone, and read God's Word alone, and meditate alone, and share our faith as individuals, but never are we asked to take the Lord's Supper alone. The Lord's Supper is always shared within the community of the church. When we meet around this table together we are all agreeing that Jesus Christ died for us and that He is coming again.

Verse 27 warns Christians not to take the Lord's Supper an unworthy manner. Because of the solemnness of the sacrifice our Lord made, each Christian must remember the death of Jesus and what it means to him. To casually take of the Supper makes one guilty.

Due to the seriousness of taking the Supper and the guilt that can come who takes unworthily, a man is called on to examine himself. While this is an individual examination, the Lord's Supper is a corporate event in the church. When Jesus first instituted the Supper in the upper room, he was surrounded by his disciples. The Lord's Supper is not an individualistic introspection alone, but also a communal declaration of our faith in the atoning death of Jesus and his promise to return.

In verse 29, Christians are called on to "discern the body." This word carries the idea of evaluating and tells us that Christians need to think about the body of Christ. While we may think about his physical body which was crucified at Calvary, Christians also consider his body today which is the church.

9. What are the two warnings of verse 27 and 29 and how do they differ?

10. What penalty arose in verse 30 for taking the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner?

11. According to verse 31 how can one escape being judged concerning their partaking of the Lord's Supper?

12. What is the purpose of the discipline of the Lord surrounding the Lord's Supper? (vs. 32)

In verses 33-34 Paul reverts to speaking about the *Agape* meal and instructs the Corinthian Christians to think about each other. Wait for each other (probably some had to work past the time when the wealthier could begin gathering together.) There were other problems in the church, probably surrounding the Lord's Supper, which Paul hoped to address on a subsequent visit.

The Lord's Supper should be a unifying event within the church as we reverently consider what Jesus did for us and all our brothers and sisters in Christ. May we use it to grow closer to Christ and to one another and never abuse it so that we are judged or that our meetings do more harm than good.