

Session 1

LORD'S SUPPER

I Corinthians 11:17-34

Memory Verse

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

– I CORINTHIANS 11:17, CSB



LORD'S SUPPER

THEOLOGICAL THEME: When we come to the table, we humbly remember Christ's atoning sacrifice for us, celebrate the gospel as a source of our unity as a church, and examine ourselves (vv. 27-29).

CALL TO ACTION: Take time to examine yourself before next taking the Lord's Supper.

Over the next couple of weeks, we're going to do a short study on church ordinances. Ordinances are simply outward rites (or external signs) that act as visible signs of the gospel.¹ Baptists observe two ordinances, both commanded by Christ in the New Testament: the Lord's Supper (or communion) and baptism.

Today, we're studying the Lord's Supper. All four Gospel writers recorded the command to take this meal by Jesus at the last supper (Matthew 26:26-29, Mark 14:22-25, Luke 22:14-19, John 6:53-58). In Luke 2:19, Jesus said: Do this in remembrance of me.

We participate in the Lord's Supper to remember the sacrifice Jesus made for us on the cross. Jesus gave this command at the Passover meal with His disciples. Jewish Passover is about remembering how God provided for His people in the Exodus. But at the Last Supper, Jesus gave this meal of remembrance a new meaning. God bids His people to "remember" all throughout Scripture, and in this sign act, we remember the most important thing God has ever done for us: sending Jesus to die on the cross so our sins could be forgiven. When we participate in the Lord's Supper, we remember what Christ has done for us in the past and affirm our dedication to live for Him daily.

This act is meaningful and important. Today, we'll read about how the people in the Corinthian church weren't taking this act of worship seriously and what Paul had to say about it.



How have you observed the Lord's Supper throughout your time in the church?

How do we keep this time as worship and not merely a routine?

Session Summary

The Corinthian church had a heart problem. Some of the members were behaving selfishly, living more like pagans than followers of Christ. Paul's letter chided this behavior. Instead of the wealthy gathering early and indulging in so much food and drink that there was hardly any left when the poorer members of the church arrived, they should consider their brothers and sisters, making sure everyone had what they needed.

The Lord's Supper was meant to help them remember Christ's sacrifice for them and inspire an ongoing commitment to live for Christ. This practice is reverent and honoring of Christ, but the Corinthian church were taking this meal wrongly. Paul called them to examine their hearts, taking a long, hard look at their behavior.

1. For The Worse (1 Corinthians 11:17-22)

 What complaint did Paul bring against the church in Corinth and why was this a problem?

 How was their gathering “for the worse” (v.17)?


Within the population of ancient Corinth, there was a vast divide. In this big city of trade, slaves (approximately 400,000) outnumbered the free population (around 250,000),² and a stark disparity of wealth existed. Alciphron, a Greek writer from the second century characterized the city by the “nauseating behavior of the rich and the misery of the poor.”³ Unfortunately, the church was not exempt from these unjust ways of operating.

Tearing down these dividing lines upheld by society would have been hard for the first-century Christian. In the kingdom, no matter what side of these dividing lines you fall on, you are equal to fellow believers. In Corinth, the Jew was equal to the Gentile. The slave was

equal to the free. The male was equal to the female. All were important members of the body. And not only are all equally important in the body of Christ, but Paul wrote in Philippians 2:3-4 that we should consider others as better than ourselves (even if society considered them less important).

But this wasn't happening in the church in ancient Corinth, and evidentially many people didn't realize how big of a problem this was. The gathering of the Christian community should be a good thing (we were created for this!), but Paul wrote that their coming together was for the worse.

Due to their status, wealthy Corinthians were able to arrive at the church's worship gathering earlier, while poorer believers arrived much later (after working long hours).⁴ But instead of considering the plight of many in the congregation, these wealthy believers were eating so much of the food that the rest of the congregation was going hungry by the time they arrived after work. Rather than humbly putting others before themselves, they selfishly put themselves first. Paul even wrote that some of them were indulging to the point of getting drunk (v. 21)! They were embracing the norms of their culture instead of the life Christ calls us to as believers.

 What are some ways we might act selfishly and not consider others in the church today?

For the majority of the Corinthian congregation, when they should be coming together in remembrance and worship to observe the Lord's Supper, they were instead despising the church body and humiliating "those who have nothing" (v. 22).

2. Do This in Remembrance of Me (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

 What did Paul emphasize regarding the Lord's supper in these verses?

 How were the Corinthians missing the mark?


Paul's note on receiving from the Lord here may mean that Paul received a special revelation from the Lord⁵ on this command, or simply that he was taught about the Lord's Supper as the rest of the church was, by hearing from others what Jesus Himself said at the Last Supper.⁶

Paul recapped Jesus's words regarding the Lord's Supper. What a contrast Christ's humility makes to the selfishness of the Corinthian elite. The bread in the Lord's Supper acts as a symbol for Christ's body (at the last supper, this would have been unleavened bread, used in the Passover meal), and the cup His blood (in their case, this was probably wine, which was served with the Passover meal).⁷ Together, the bread and the cup help us remember that Jesus willingly offered up His body for death on the cross as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. When we take communion, we remember that Christ suffered and died for our behalf and we "proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (v. 26), honoring the gospel message.

 **How does taking the Lord's Supper in an improper manner contradict the reason Christ gave the meal?**

The act of taking communion is a reverent and important one, and the actions of the Corinthian church made a mockery of it. We must be careful to not do the same.

3. Self-Examination (1 Corinthians 11:27-34)

 **What did Paul call out as sin in these verses? What warning did Paul give for those who took this ordinance in a sinful way?**

 **What did he encourage the Corinthian believers to do?**

The Lord's Supper commemorates the cross and the suffering and death Christ endured for us. Participating in it "in an unworthy manner" (v. 27) is sinning against the Lord. Paul's callout on unworthiness was a direct reference to their actions in this situation.⁸

Paul urged the Corinthian church to take a long, hard look at their hearts. This is always a necessary task, even if often a difficult one. Like a car out of alignment, our hearts drift toward the desires of our flesh, and we are often good at rationalizing misdirection. Can you see how the Corinthian elite might have rationalized theirs? It's not a crime to eat if you are hungry. Gathering and building community is good. But they'd missed the mark in their broader actions, and we often do, too. A faithful examination of our hearts requires us to set aside our egos and ask the Lord to reveal hard truths. Is there something I'm missing here? Does my behavior need correction? Will You show it to me and show me what to do? Paul called the Corinthians examine themselves and consider if their behavior toward fellow Christians was appropriate. If yes, then they should participate in the Lord's Supper. If not, they were to confess and repent.



What does it look like to examine our hearts before the Lord regularly today? Why do we need to do this?

Paul wrote that the Corinthians' sinful behavior in this matter brought God's judgment on them. Paul said the instances of weakness, sickness, and even death among them were a result of divine judgment because of their abuse of this ordinance. The term "fallen asleep" (v. 30) is often used in the New Testament to refer to physical death. But there's hope! If they took Paul's counsel to examine their behavior and make righteous changes, they "would not be judged" (v. 31).

We shouldn't interpret this passage to mean that all weakness, sickness, and death are a consequence of sin. Paul was commenting on a specific situation for a specific group of people.

Having fully outlined the problem and need, Paul finished this section with a reminder of what to do from here. The CSB translates verse 33 as, "Therefore, my brothers and sisters, when you come together to eat, welcome one another." The NIV translates it as, "So then, my brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat, you should all eat together."

The elite were eating so much that there was nothing left for the poorer in the church when they arrived. If they were hungry, Paul told them to eat at home, then they wouldn't be tempted to sin against God and their brothers and sisters in Christ as the assembly. And when they did meet together, they "should all eat together" (v. 33, NIV), unified in Christ.

Paul also offered to give further directions (v. 34) when he came to see them. Paul displayed godly leadership in that he was disappointed by their sinful actions, but he wasn't going to write them off. Instead, he addressed their sin, desiring to see them grow and he intended to keep discipling them.

Conclusion

The Corinthian church had a problem. Their congregation wasn't putting aside their former way of life and instead living new in Christ like Paul wrote about in Ephesians 4:


But that is not how you came to know Christ, assuming you heard about him and were taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus, to take off your former way of life, the old self that is corrupted by deceitful desires, to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, the one created according to God's likeness in righteousness and purity of the truth.


—Ephesians 4:20-24


Instead, they put themselves first. With leisure time to spare, the wealthy of the church came together early, well before the poorer working church members could arrive, and ate so much food that there wasn't enough left for those who really needed it. What should have been a time of remembrance of the gospel was instead humiliating to those in the church of a poorer standing. This is not Christ's desire, and Paul's letter corrected this behavior.

These believers should have been coming together to share in the Lord's Supper, as Christ commanded. As Jesus taught, the bread and the cup of the last supper symbolize His body and blood. Taking these elements was meant act as an intentional moment to reflect on and remember the great sacrifice He made for us. Christ willingly suffered and died on the cross because He loves us so deeply. This moment of remembrance should be thoughtful and reverent, honoring of Christ and the gospel, but the Corinthians had failed to practice this ordinance properly.

Paul told them to examine their own hearts. Were they relating righteously to their fellow believers? If so, they should continue to participate in the Lord's Supper with a clear conscience. If not, they brought judgment on themselves and needed to confess and repent before the Lord and others.

 How are we tempted to be selfish and not consider others as more important than ourselves in the church today? What can we do about this?

 For you, does communion feel reverent and thoughtful, or does it feel more mechanical? How can we change our heart posture around this ordinance?

 How does living together in humble service as the church give us opportunity to share our hope with outsiders?

Memorize

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

- 1 Corinthians 11:17, CSB

References

¹Augustus Hopkins Strong, *Systematic Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1907), 930.

²Mark J. Keown, *Discovering the New Testament: An Introduction to Its Background, Theology, and Themes: The Pauline Letters*, vol. II (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2021), 459.

³Matthew S. Beal, "Corinth," in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

⁴John D. Barry et al., *Faithlife Study Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012, 2016), 1 Co 11:18.

⁵F. Alan Tomlinson, "1 Corinthians," in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1828.

⁶Christopher A. Beetham and Nancy L. Erickson, eds., *The NIV Application Commentary on the Bible*, One-Volume Edition, NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2024), 1103.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Ibid.