

# In Remembrance of Christ

*1 Corinthians 11:17-34*

This morning I would have you turn in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 11. About half way through this chapter we find the familiar teaching of Paul to the Corinthians concerning that which we will celebrate in our second hour, the Lord's Supper. Generally speaking we begin most considerations of this teaching with verse 23. However, as we make our own preparations to celebrate the Lord's Supper this day, I would like to begin our study back in verse 17 and put the reason for Paul's instruction concerning this celebration into its proper context, discovering why it is that he included this instruction in the first place.

As you may or may not know, the church at Corinth was anything but a model church. In this first letter to the Corinthians, Paul commends this church for little and reprimands them for all sorts of improper and immoral behavior. I find this interesting because sometimes we do tend to think of the apostolic church, that is the first congregations started by the apostles of the Lord Jesus Christ, to have been among the most moral and pristine of churches through the ages. Sadly, this could not be said of the church at Corinth, whose problems included issues of pride, divisions among one another, immorality in the church, believers suing one another, unbiblical views marriage, the use or misuse of spiritual gifts and on and on. And it is in this context that we find the Corinthian Church also having defective and destructive practices of worship, fellowship and the partaking of the Lord's Supper.

If we are to rightly understand the meaning of Paul's instructions concerning the Lord's Supper in 11:23-29, we put this teaching in the broader context of 11:17-34. It is from these verses that I wish to cover three key points:

- I. The Problems – surrounding the Lord's Supper (11:17-22)
- II. The Purpose – of the Lord's Supper (11:23-26)
- III. The Preparation – for the Lord's Supper (11:27-34)

Let us turn our attention then to the first point, the problems of this church as it relates to the Lord's Supper and begin by reading 11:17-22.

## **I. The Problems (11:17-22)**

*17 But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse. 18 For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part I believe it. 19 For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you. 20 Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper, 21 for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk. 22 What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you.*

From these verses we will find three specific problems that the congregation needed to be confronted on and these serve to remind us to be careful of such attitudes being found in us as individuals or even as a church in whole. Before we look at these three problems, notice the concern of Paul in verse 17 where he says in effect, "Now before I instruct you concerning your practice of the Lord's Supper, I have to tell you that your coming together, that is your supposed worship and fellowship, is not aiding in the betterment of the congregation but is actually causing

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distress and disunity in the congregation.” Paul is emphatic in his disapproval of how they are conducting themselves saying plainly in verse 17, **“I do not praise you...”** and sarcastically in verse 22, **“Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you.”** So then, just what are the problems that concern Paul and which he addresses?

## **1. The problem of schisms (18-19)**

*18 For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part I believe it. 19 For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you.*

To begin with, Paul says of this congregation, that in its meeting times there were **“divisions”** or in the Greek, *schismata* – that is “schisms” – and by this Paul meant that reports had been given that when the people came together for their worship and fellowship, that rather than truly meeting and mixing together, strong cliques had formed; people were separating themselves from others. As we will come to see, it appears that one of the reasons for these divisions was socio-economic; that is the rich and affluent tended to congregate together leaving the poor and social outcasts to themselves.

The problem with this is that by and large, the church at Corinth did not meet simply weekly in a large building, but was dependent upon those with homes, generally those of some wealth and affluence, to open their homes for worship and fellowship. What we need to remember is that the fellowship of the first century church was far more social than what we often see today. When the church gathered, there was generally some kind of worship that included the apostles’ teaching. This would be followed by a meal, often called a “love feast” where believers of all backgrounds, Jews and Gentiles, rich and poor, men and women, would enjoy a feast together. This love feast was a time in which the more wealthy and affluent members were to share their bounty with the poorer members of the congregation. It has been said that for some of the believers, this would be their only decent meal in the week or for several days. But, as time progressed, and this is evident in our text, it seems that those who had houses (v. 22) and by implication plenty to eat, were not mixing or including those who had nothing (v. 22). They were divided, showing favoritism. This is not unlike the admonishment of James to his readers in 2:2-4 where we read,

***2 For if a man comes into your assembly with a gold ring and dressed in fine clothes, and there also comes in a poor man in dirty clothes, 3 and you pay special attention to the one who is wearing the fine clothes, and say, “You sit here in a good place,” and you say to the poor man, “You stand over there, or sit down by my footstool,” 4 have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil motives?***

But the problem appears not only to be of these social divisions, but also then of what we read in verse 19, that **“there must also be factions among you...”** The word **“factions”** or more literally, now listen, *haireseis* or heresies, which we normally associate with unbiblical teaching, which is true, but here it more accurately speaks of those who simply pull away or pull out in order to teach or do what they want. The problem with this church was that too many wanted their own way and were making their own cliques or groups to do so without concern for the unity of the body of Christ. It is also interesting to note that Paul says how these factions or

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separate parties can be identified – namely if they only approve or allow certain members of the congregation to “fellowship with them” then they are in essence, heretics – who again, are not concerning themselves with unity in church around the teaching of the Word and the partaking of the Lord’s Supper, but are more interesting in establishing their little kingdoms within the Kingdom.

We all must be wary of such an attitude in the church. Truly the Lord gifts His people and grants them talents and concerns. Some may be more interested in Children’s ministries, another with Missions and yet another with Music. We must be careful not to separate ourselves inappropriately with just those who see things our way, or only with those of the same age, or life situation as this can lead to disunity of the church. It is not wrong to participate in such groups, but not to the exclusion, and as we will see, to the belittling of others who are not in our “clique.”

## **2. The problem of selfishness (20-21)**

*20 Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper, 21 for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk.*

But the problem was not only that of schisms, but also one of selfishness. There seems to be another sense of sarcasm here. Addressing this more affluent group at Corinth, Paul says that when they meet together under the guise of this “love feast” and under the name of the Lord’s Supper, it is not really the Lord’s Supper they are practicing. Why is this, again because the Lord’s Supper was to promote unity of thought and fellowship with one another and yet what is implied in these verses is that the wealthy members were simply eating their own food, not sharing, leaving other members to go hungry – and can you believe how horrific this would be to use today, some of the members even were getting drunk, intoxicated.

And so, at a meal where the point was to share and promote unity, many of the members were selfish, thinking only of themselves, their own wants and their own pleasures. These were members who got so full of themselves they could not think of others. Oh may the Lord keep us from being selfish and full of ourselves. May we be like Teddy Roosevelt, who, with a friend would gaze upon the night sky, point out a cluster of stars and recite, “That is the Spiral Galaxy in Andromeda. It is as large as our Milky Way. It is one of a hundred million galaxies. It consists of one hundred billion suns, each larger than our sun.” And Then Roosevelt would grin and say, “Now I think we are small enough! Let’s go to bed.”

## **3. The problem of shamefulness (22)**

*22 What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you.*

So, we have seen two attitudes that were causing the love feast and the Lord’s Supper to be misused, that of causing schisms, selfishness and now the final problem addressed, shamefulness. [Read 11:22]. By shamefulness I mean that those who should have been promoting sharing and having sympathy for other members in the church were rather seeking to shame the underprivileged of the church. Rather than thinking about the other members in the church, our text says these actually “despised” or literally “thought against” such members. This was not simply a careless oversight but a purposeful scorning of those who did not meet with some self-appointed, unbiblical criteria for fellowship.

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We must be careful not to discourage or despise someone or some group of professing believers because they are of a different race, or because they are from a higher or lower economic status, or because they are blue-collar or white-collar workers. There is a sense in which Paul is saying, since you have houses to live and food to eat, what are you doing to meet the needs of others in the church. But as it is you disregard and ignore such needs which, looking back at verse 20, actually destroys the whole purpose of this time where Paul said that even when you do come together, it is obviously not for the purpose of the Lord's Supper because you are more bent on shaming others than helping others. For this Paul could not and would not praise them.

## II. The Purpose (11:23-26)

So then, these were the problems that were diminishing and destroying the purpose of the love feast and subsequently the Lord's Supper. Therefore, after pointing out these problems, with the intent that they would be rightfully shamed into repentance, Paul then restates for them the purpose of the Lord's Supper – that it is was not a time to stuff their faces to the neglect of others, but to remember what it was that God did for them as helpless, hopeless sinners through Jesus Christ. And to get them to this purpose, he reminds them in verse 23 that this is the teaching of the Lord and takes them back to that blessed night in which our Lord Himself explained the meaning and significance of sharing this Lord's Supper together. Briefly then, we find in verses 24-26 three explanations or purposes to be remembered.

### 1. The purpose of the bread (23b-24)

*23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which 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."*

Even as we see in verses 23-25, the essential elements of this memorial meal are the bread and the cup. We begin with the bread [Read verses 23-24]. Let us remember that the bread pictures for us the physical body of Jesus Christ. I would like to point out that in the bread we must see two truths; both the suffering of Christ as well as the sufficiency of Christ. Jesus is the Savior who suffered for us and He is the Sufficient One who meets our every need.

So then, when you hold that piece of bread in your hand, what are you to remember? Remember the suffering of Christ. And why did He suffer? He suffered because of your sin. The body of Jesus was viciously beaten and nailed to a cross because of your sin. How is that for heavy? And why is this? Why did He suffer for those who would believe? Because without your sin, your rebellion against God, your doing things your own way rather than God's way being paid for, without it being atoned for, you cannot be reconciled, brought near, be at peace with God. And who can pay this price? No mere man can as we read in Psalms 49:7-8

***7 No man can by any means redeem his brother or give to God a ransom for him - 8 For the redemption of his soul is costly, and he should cease trying forever -***

A mere man cannot redeem another man, but He who is both man and God, human and divine, like us physically and yet perfect and without sin; such a Man's suffering and sacrifice is more than able to make us right with God, to atone for our sin. Truly, by His stripes, by His suffering, by His sacrifice we are healed, restored, made right for a relationship with God. The

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bread reminds us of this provision of God, the sending of His Son to be the propitiation, the satisfying payment for our sin, if we do believe He died for us so that we might, according to the words of 2 Corinthians 5:15, ***“no longer live for [ourselves], but for Him who died and rose again on [our] behalf.”***

But not only is the bread to remind us of the suffering of Christ for us, but also of the sufficiency of Christ for us. When God the Father “was crushed Him” for our iniquities, it was not only for the payment of our sins, but also for the provision of our souls. Just as bread is seen as a staple of physical life, Jesus, as the bread of life, is to be remembered as our only true staple of life. And while a diet of earthly bread may not seem too exciting to us, remember that in Christ we have all that we need, everything necessary for life and godliness. How often do we remember the truth of Romans 8:32 as we hold that bread,

***He [God] who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely [graciously, abundantly] give us all things?***

So then, in the bread then we are to see both the suffering and sufficiency of Christ.

## ***2. The purpose of the cup (25)***

*25 In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.”*

In addition to the bread, the second element of which we partake is the cup. We are well aware that the cup pictures the blood of Christ. [Read 11:25]. Let us remember that in the Scriptures, blood is symbolic of life as we read in Leviticus 17:11;

***For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it to you on the altar to make atonement for your souls; for it is the blood by reason of the life that makes atonement.***

While not recorded by Paul here in our text, we know from Matthew 26:28 that Jesus said this about cup, ***“for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”*** To speak of blood being poured out is to speak of His life being poured out as the only sufficient payment for our sins. The cup you will hold in your hand pictures something more valuable than anything else you could ever possess for by the blood of Christ you have been redeemed, bought back from a life of sin, of waywardness from God so that you might now live for God. This is the truth of 1 Peter 1:18-19;

***18 knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, 19 but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.***

In the sacrifice of Christ we have been granted a restored relationship to our God, we have fellowship with Him and with His Son, we have the indwelling presence of His Spirit. In the Lord’s Supper, we are to graphically remember that God has richly blessed us who were spiritually poor, without hope and without means with all His goodness. How could the Corinthians so mock other

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believers and be so arrogant so as not to rightly share with one another in the love feast that preceded the true meaning of love as displayed in the Lord's Supper? Will we be so careless?

### **3. The purpose of the practice (26)**

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

So, we have seen the purpose of the bread and the cup, but finally, what is the purpose of this practice? Why are we to regularly partake of the Lord's Supper. We read the answer in 11:26 [Read Text].

The purpose of practicing the Lord's Supper is that it serves to remind us of the provision of God, pictured in the bread and the cup, realized in the person and work of Jesus Christ, who was beaten, crucified and died for our sins, so that as He has paid for our sin and in effect buried them in the tomb; and as He has raised to newness of life, we too might be dead to sin and alive to God and as we live for God, we are to be proclaiming the greatness and the benefits of the death of Christ from now until He returns. When we take the bread and cup we are to know that we are saying to one another at least two things; "look back and see what Jesus did for us in dying for our sins;" and "look ahead to when He comes again a second time without reference to sin."

### **III. The Preparation (11:27-34)**

This brings us then to our final point. Having seen the problems that faced the Corinthian Church concerning their practice of the Lord's Supper and then the purpose of the Lord's Supper, Paul concludes this section by instructing these believers how they ought to prepare for this time. We see in verses 27-34 the preparation for the Lord's Supper which includes at least three things.

#### **1. Essential Examination (27-28)**

*27 Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. 28 But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup.*

Having already exposed the shameful manner in which they were practicing, or not correctly practicing the Lord's Supper in verses 17-22, Paul first reminds them of the gravity of their behavior, that partaking of the Lord's Supper in an "unworthy manner" as they had been doing was to be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, that is they were in effect despising the sacrifice of Christ which was meant to reconcile them to God and unify them with one another. I would like to point out that when we read, the phrase, "unworthy manner" we are not to think that we are in any way worthy in ourselves of participating with the Lord and with His church in this Supper – no one is worthy. This statement means we are not to take the elements of this Supper unworthily of their significance. We must not take them carelessly, irreverently or with any type of defiant spirit.

How to we guard against this? According to verse 29 we must examine, or literally, "test" ourselves. Can we see proof in ourselves that we are sincere, humble and grateful for getting to partake of these elements before God and in the presence of other genuine believers? Are we coming to the Supper with any issues of schisms – broken fellowship; of selfishness – thinking of

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our own wants and desires; or of shamefulness – despising and scorning others in the church. Any attitudes of sin must be removed, lest there be divine discipline.

## **2. Divine Discipline (29-32)**

*29 For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. 30 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. 31 But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. 32 But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world.*

Flowing out of this examination is to be a recognition that if we don't judge or discern ourselves rightly, then the result will be some kind of divine discipline or judgment. [Read text]. Paul says here that one of the reasons why there is weakness, sickness and even death in the fellowship is because many had refused to examine themselves. This may seem harsh to us – that God would judge a congregation and its members for an irreverence for the Lord's Supper, but note that this divine discipline is truly gracious. For if we, upon examination of ourselves, upon careful consideration and confession of sin, upon realizing that perhaps we are weak or sick because the Lord is lovingly disciplining us to draw us back to Himself – then we can know that the Lord's discipline has corrected us, showing us to be His children, giving us assurance that we will not be condemned with the world. I would much rather be lovingly disciplined of the Lord than wrathfully and eternally condemn by Him.

*The three questions which the Rev. Philip Henry advised people to put to themselves in self-examination before the sacrament were -- "What am I?" "What have I done?" and "What do I want?"*

## **3. Fervent Fellowship (33-34)**

*33 So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. 34 If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that you will not come together for judgment. The remaining matters I will arrange when I come.*

Finally then we see Paul sum up his instruction to counter the deplorable practice of the Lord's Supper by the Corinthians. [Read Text]. He appeals to them as brothers and gives them some practical solutions to be exercised. The first solution is simple – there is nothing complex about right worship. He says, "when you come together to eat" – that is when you have your love feast and partake of the Lord's Supper – "**wait for one another.**" - that is, have the expectation, desire and decency to make sure everyone is present, everyone is prepared and everyone is provided for. The love feast and the Lord's Supper was to be celebrated in unity, in fellowship, together, by all in the church. And if the people would simply wait for one another and wait on one another, then issues of schisms, selfishness and shamefulness would be prevented.

The final solution offered is also a simple one, "if you are hungry" – here we have a reminder that if your sole purpose in attending this love feast and the celebration of the Lord's Supper was merely to satisfy your own physical hunger, then eat at home. The purpose of this time is for fellowship with Christ and His people, not for gluttony. Coming to the Lord's Supper is to indicate to ourselves and to others not a desire for satisfying physical hunger, but rather is to be because of a spiritual hunger. If the love feast and Lord's Supper results only in gluttony and

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drunkenness, as Paul indicated, then all that is accomplished by such a time is the judgment of God.

Beloved, the Lord's Supper is not to be regarded as a common time, but an especially blessed time. Why? Because the our Lord Himself established it and commanded each and every believer to regard is as sacred, as a time to be reminded of Him who has called us together as the church; to be reminded of His great love for us in dying for our sins; to be reminded that His promise to come again is connected to this very meal; to remember that as we gather and partake of this ordinance together, we are expressing the very unity that Jesus Himself prayed for in John 17:20-21

***I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.***

May we long for and demonstrate the unity of our fellowship by rightly preparing ourselves to partake of the Lord's Supper. May we express a selfless love for one another, sharing with one another of both spiritual and physical blessings to the glory of God and so that the world might see through us that God has sent His Son to redeem those who would call upon His name.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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