

## Problems at the Table

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

### Intro

**Familiarity:** "Familiarity breeds contempt" (Aesop). "Though familiarity may not breed contempt, it takes off the edge of admiration" (William Hazlitt).

- Each week we take the Lord's Supper (typically 50 weeks a year; -Candlelight and Sunday off). Some churches choose to celebrate the Lord's Supper (LS) monthly or quarterly (that's fine). I heard one pastor say they didn't want to celebrate the LS too frequently because they didn't want it to become stale or too familiar. I'll take that argument seriously when you don't sing, preach, or collect the offering weekly 😊.
- Within this week's text we have the Scripture we read more than any other passage in our church services (vv. 23-26).
- We can thank the Corinthian church for messing up the Lord's Supper because without their mistake we wouldn't have the most formative and important teaching on the topic (from this passage)

The Lord's Supper is a visible reminder in the midst of our gathering as a church of the gospel and all of its dimensions.

<sup>17</sup> But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. <sup>18</sup> For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, <sup>19</sup> for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. <sup>20</sup> When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. <sup>21</sup> For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. <sup>22</sup> What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not. <sup>23</sup> For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, <sup>24</sup> 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." <sup>25</sup> In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." <sup>26</sup> For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. <sup>27</sup> Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. <sup>28</sup> Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. <sup>29</sup> For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. <sup>30</sup> That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. <sup>31</sup> But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. <sup>32</sup> But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. <sup>33</sup> So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait

for one another—<sup>34</sup> if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for judgment. About the other things I will give directions when I come.<sup>1</sup>

## 1. The Present Problem: Division at Church (vv. 17-22)

<sup>17</sup> But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. <sup>18</sup> For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, <sup>19</sup> for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. <sup>20</sup> When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. <sup>21</sup> For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. <sup>22</sup> What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.

**You're in Trouble:** <sup>17</sup> But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. This is the opposite of 11:2 where he did commend them for keeping the traditions he had passed on. It seems they are doing the rituals he showed them but the way they are doing them is wrong.

- What good is coming to church if it's going to make you sin *more* rather than less.
  - “We never lie more than when we sing in church” (Reid). What if you come to church and are jealous or angry? You can do the “right” thing (LS) for the wrong reasons and it is sin. The solution is not to stop doing the “right” thing but to do it “rightly.”

**Gathering:** <sup>18</sup> For, in the first place, when you come together as a church,

- Pause: The command of scripture is to gather. The assumption of Paul is that we gather. All of this takes place at the gathering.
  - “When you come together”; συνέρχομαι (5x this section; vss. 17, 18, 20, 33, 34).
- **Gathering the entire body at the same place for the same purpose is essential to the identity and function of the local church.**
  - Not being legalistic but being realistic. Your presence matters. This is the only time our whole church gathers for discipleship through the Word (discipleship is

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<sup>1</sup> <sup>17</sup> Τοῦτο δὲ παραγγέλλων οὐκ ἐπαινῶ ὅτι οὐκ εἰς τὸ κρείσσον ἀλλὰ εἰς τὸ ἥσσον συνέρχεσθε. <sup>18</sup> πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ συνερχομένων ὑμῶν ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ ἀκούω σχίσματα ἐν ὑμῖν ὑπάρχειν καὶ μέρος τι πιστεύω. <sup>19</sup> δεῖ γὰρ καὶ αἵρέσεις ἐν ὑμῖν εἶναι, ἵνα [καί] οἱ δοκιμοὶ φανεροὶ γένωνται ἐν ὑμῖν. <sup>20</sup> Συνερχομένων οὖν ὑμῶν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ οὐκ ἔστιν κυριακὸν δεῖπνον φαγεῖν. <sup>21</sup> ἕκαστος γὰρ τὸ ἴδιον δεῖπνον προλαμβάνει ἐν τῷ φαγεῖν, καὶ ὅς μὲν πεινᾷ ὅς δὲ μεθύει. <sup>22</sup> μὴ γὰρ οἰκίας οὐκ ἔχετε εἰς τὸ ἐσθίειν καὶ πίνειν; ἢ τῆς ἐκκλησίας τοῦ θεοῦ καταφρονεῖτε, καὶ καταισχύνετε τοὺς μὴ ἔχοντας; τί εἶπω ὑμῖν; ἐπαινέσω ὑμᾶς; ἐν τούτῳ οὐκ ἐπαινῶ. <sup>23</sup> Ἐγὼ γὰρ παρέλαβον ἀπὸ τοῦ κυρίου, ὃ καὶ παρέδωκα ὑμῖν, ὅτι ὁ κύριος Ἰησοῦς ἐν τῇ νυκτὶ ἣ παρεδίδοτο ἔλαβεν ἄρτον <sup>24</sup> καὶ εὐχαριστήσας ἔκλασεν καὶ εἶπεν, Τοῦτό μου ἔστιν τὸ σῶμα τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν· τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν. <sup>25</sup> ὡσαύτως καὶ τὸ ποτήριον μετὰ τὸ δεῖπνησαι λέγων, Τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἢ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ ἐμῷ αἵματι· τοῦτο ποιεῖτε, ὡσάκις ἐὰν πίνητε, εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν. <sup>26</sup> ὡσάκις γὰρ ἐὰν ἐσθίητε τὸν ἄρτον τοῦτον καὶ τὸ ποτήριον πίνητε, τὸν θάνατον τοῦ κυρίου καταγγέλλετε ἄχρις οὗ ἔλθῃ. <sup>27</sup> Ὡστε ὅς ἂν ἐσθίῃ τὸν ἄρτον ἢ πίνῃ τὸ ποτήριον τοῦ κυρίου ἀναζῆως, ἔνοχος ἔσται τοῦ σώματος καὶ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ κυρίου. <sup>28</sup> δοκιμαζέτω δὲ ἄνθρωπος ἑαυτὸν καὶ οὕτως ἐκ τοῦ ἄρτου ἐσθιέτω καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ποτηρίου πινέτω. <sup>29</sup> ὁ γὰρ ἐσθίων καὶ πίνων κρίμα ἑαυτῷ ἐσθίει καὶ πίνει μὴ διακρίνων τὸ σῶμα. <sup>30</sup> διὰ τοῦτο ἐν ὑμῖν πολλοὶ ἀσθενεῖς καὶ ἄρρωστοὶ καὶ κοιμῶνται ἱκανοί. <sup>31</sup> εἰ δὲ ἑαυτοὺς διεκρίνομεν, οὐκ ἂν ἐκρινόμεθα. <sup>32</sup> κρινόμενοι δὲ ὑπὸ [τοῦ] κυρίου παιδευόμεθα, ἵνα μὴ σὺν τῷ κόσμῳ κατακριθῶμεν. <sup>33</sup> ὥστε, ἀδελφοί μου, συνερχόμενοι εἰς τὸ φαγεῖν ἀλλήλους ἐκδέχεσθε. <sup>34</sup> εἴ τις πεινᾷ, ἐν οἴκῳ ἐσθιέτω, ἵνα μὴ εἰς κρίμα συνέρχησθε. τὰ δὲ λοιπὰ ὡς ἂν ἔλθω διατάξομαι.

more than the weekly gathering *but not less*). We preach through books of the Bible, if you attend once or twice a month there are huge wholes in your biblical knowledge.

- People want all sort of personalized meetings but won't show up to the time we have set aside to gather as a body. Show up early, stay late.
- “Regular” attendance used to be 5 of 6, then 3 of 4, now 50%. If you wouldn't miss work for it, you shouldn't miss church for it.
  - If once a week gathering with the body of Christ is too much, I don't know what to tell you. Ezra read Scripture for 6 hours to an attentive audience. Many of us can't make it 6 minutes (Neh 8:3). The early church met daily to pray and listen to Bible teaching. Many struggle to make it weekly (Acts 2:42-47).

**Division in the Church:** I hear that there are divisions (σχίσματα ) among you. And I believe it in part, <sup>19</sup> for there must be factions (αἰρέσεις) among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized.

- We've seen this problem already discussed in 1 Cor 1:10-17 based on a report by Chloe's people (1 Cor 1:11). And Paul thinks it's quite believable if for no other reason than differences are normal and natural in a fallen world (even in the church!). We should expect disagreement in church but not disunity! Every church that got a book deal in the NT is gone.
  - There is no perfect church (if you find one, don't join it because you'll mess it up).
  - “There is neither a ‘perfect person for me’ nor a ‘perfect church for me.’ In relationships and in faith, it's about commitment rather than consumerism” (McCracken).
  - “Those who love their dream of a Christian community more than they love the Christian community itself become destroyers of that Christian community even though their personal intentions may be ever so honest, earnest, and sacrificial... Those who dream of this idolized community demand that it be fulfilled by God, by others and by themselves... It is not we who build. Christ builds the church” (Bonhoeffer).
  - Be careful that you don't demand a church fulfill all your desires. Rather, work to enjoy each person in that church as a gift. **Work for the health of the church so that Christ will be glorified, not to get all of your preferences satisfied.** Differences are normal and natural, no perfect church. **Tension:** love the people of your church while working to make your church better.
- The great danger for the church is more frequently division from within than attack from without.
  - That's why Paul discusses it so frequently (e.g., Phil 1:27-2:11). That's why unity is the thing that Jesus prayed for in his church (Jn 17).
  - “In an **autoimmune disease**, the immune system attacks healthy cells. In the body of Christ, we are so inward-looking that we sometimes waste our efforts attacking one another instead of promoting Christ” (Keener).

- Paul has heard that this division not only occurs with favorite preachers or ethnic cliques but even shows up **when they gather**.
  - “*Coming together*” for worship is of no value if we don’t “*come together*” when we worship. The Corinthians have gathered for worship but are divided in their hearts and in their actions.

**Issue:** <sup>20</sup> When you come together, it is not the Lord’s supper (κυριακὸν δεῖπνον) that you eat. <sup>21</sup> For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. <sup>22</sup> What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.

- **Terminology:** We have three typical terms for the practice we are describing.
  - (1) “**Lord’s Supper**” (κυριακὸν δεῖπνον) from 11:20. It is not the Lord’s supper (κυριακὸν δεῖπνον) that you eat. Highlighting the origin of this ordinance (from Christ) and the object of our worship (Christ). This isn’t a normal meal.
  - (2) “**Communion**” (κοινωνία) from 10:16. “Participation” or “fellowship” (fellowship is too weak because there is real union with Christ and with others. The cup of blessing that we bless (τὸ ποτήριον τῆς εὐλογίας ὃ εὐλογοῦμεν), is it not a participation (κοινωνία) in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation (κοινωνία) in the body of Christ? (10:16).
  - (3) “**Eucharist**” (εὐχαριστέω) from 11:24. And when he had given thanks, he broke it. This is the preferred RC term (so many of us have an aversion to it) but it’s nothing to be afraid of.
    - Each term has something commendable about it.
- **Context:** There were no church buildings. Mainly met in people’s homes. Who would have a home big enough for a large group to meet in (wealthy). There seems to have been a meal (e.g., love feast Jude 12, 2 Pet 2:13). Communal meals were common in early Christianity (e.g., Tertullian, Hippolytus).
  - We had meals as a church when RH started at my house (e.g., welcome center, worship center, fellowship hall, kids ministry).
  - We still have meals (Baptists love a potluck; if we add any more church values, that might be one of them).
  - At some point in this larger churchwide meal, they would take the LS (bread and wine).
    - Various ways people take the LS (bread, *matza*, broken, COVID safe, common cup, intinction).
- **Problem:** The issue is not the specifics of the tradition of the LS but the Corinthian social situation that is bleeding over into the surrounding context of this ritual.
  - The Corinthians are treating this **like any other meal**. The wealthy homeowner is likely eating with their other wealthy friends, being served larger and nicer portions of food, while the poorer members of the church are left to eat elsewhere in the courtyard or hallways of the house.
  - Or maybe the wealthy are arriving early, having lots of leisure time, and not waiting for the working class or slaves to arrive from their long days. By the time

these poorer church members show up, the food is gone, the rich folks are drunk, and that leaves the latecomers hungry.

- It's the *Lord's Supper*, not just a normal meal. Act differently.

**Core:** Despite it being the "LS" they were treating it like any other meal. Eating some bread and drinking some wine is not the same as taking the LS. Rather than the gospel calling them to serve others, they were serving themselves.

- "You cannot build a church on consumers. They'll desert you at a moment's notice because they have no commitments beyond meeting their own needs" (Hirsch).
- They lacked gospel community, where others' needs were more important than their own. Where Christian status superseded social status.

Why were some Christians oblivious to the needs of their fellow Christians? They were at home in the culture of Corinth rather than the culture of the cross.

- What breaks us to see things differently? The gospel. What shows the core of the gospel, the LS. God has given us all we need for life and godliness (2 Pet 1:3) in the gospel. The solution for their disunity, the gospel which will both diagnose the problem and provide the cure.

## 2. The Necessary Foundation: A Gospel Reminder (vv. 23-26)

<sup>23</sup> For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, <sup>24</sup> 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." <sup>25</sup> In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." <sup>26</sup> For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

**Received:** <sup>23</sup> For I received (παρέλαβον) from the Lord what I also delivered (παρέδωκα) to you,

- The Lord's Supper is an enacted display of the core announcement of the gospel each time we partake of it. With the other ordinance of Baptism we have the initiation into the gospel community (baptism) and the ongoing reminder of the gospel (LS).
  - Take it seriously (e.g., membership, ordinances).
- We call them "ordinances" because they are "commanded" by Christ himself (e.g., "do this").
  - E.g., Passover with numbers and types of symbolic foods.
- This is not an invention or suggestion by Paul but a tradition handed to us by Christ himself. In fact, the words recorded here in 1 Corinthians 11 are the earliest recorded words of Jesus (1 Cor written before the Gospels).

**Last Supper:** that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed (παρεδίδοτο) took bread, <sup>24</sup> 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." <sup>25</sup> In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." <sup>26</sup>

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

- In the Lord's Supper, Paul takes us back to the Last Supper. He shows us that the bread represents his body and the wine the new covenant ("is" means "symbolizes or pictures"; if bread were his body then the wine would be his blood, not a covenant; transubstantiation is an overreading of this text). If we read the Bible like RC read "bread" here Jesus would be a *literal* light or a *literal* door (e.g., "I am" in John).
- Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is my body." And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt 26:26-28).

**Foreshadowing Exodus:** We'll be walking through Exodus after we finish 1 Corinthians, so I don't want to steal all of my own future Passover thunder, but the Last Supper, and by extension, the LS says something about Jesus, that he is fulfilling, and escalating, and doing something new in his death. A greater Exodus has come in Jesus, not just from the captivity to Pharaoh but from the captivity to sin. **How is your freedom purchased?** Through his broken body and spilled blood. He is the perfect sacrifice that no animal could be. **His sacrifice of himself is not a temporary reprieve but a permanent solution.** "Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins" (Heb 9:22).

**For You:** Maybe the most impactful words for me have been these two: for you (ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν). Remember, this is a "y'all." Jesus died for us (his church)! For, here, means, "on our behalf" or "in our place." He paid the price we couldn't pay, died the death we deserved to die, so that we could have life in him. The sinless one substituted himself for the sinner, the righteous for the unrighteous.

- "But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom 5:8).
- "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor 5:21).

**Remembrance:** In remembrance of me But we are prone to wander, to forget, to be distracted. So we need a regular reminder of the basis of our righteousness, the foundation of our faith, the anchor of our hope. And in the LS we have it.

- 9/11 "Never Forget" (worried we might), so we built a memorial. A physical reminder to connect us to the reality of this life-changing event.

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

- How often should we, as a church, take the LS? How often do we want to proclaim the gospel? How often do we need to be reminded of the sacrifice of Jesus?
- Personally, I can't fathom relegating that to some monthly or quarterly event (or less). I need the gospel as often as I can get it.



### 3. The Practical Solution: Self-Examination (vv. 27-34)

<sup>27</sup> Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. <sup>28</sup> Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. <sup>29</sup> For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. <sup>30</sup> That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. <sup>31</sup> But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. <sup>32</sup> But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. <sup>33</sup> So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another— <sup>34</sup> if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for judgment. About the other things I will give directions when I come.

**Serious:** <sup>27</sup> Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord.

- Because of the seriousness of the gospel, the significance of Christ, our sacrifice, and the value of the church, his body, we should be careful not to take the LS in an **unworthy manner**.
  - For the Corinthians, that means to ignoring their brothers and sisters in Christ in favor of their own appetites.
  - God takes this so seriously because he care so much for his *body*. The church is the body of Christ. He is her head.
  - When you sin against your brothers and sisters, you sin against Christ (1 Cor 8:12).

**Consequences:** <sup>29</sup> For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. <sup>30</sup> That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.

- The Corinthians are courting disaster rather than receiving grace (and that's what every child of God does when they come before him with sin rather than confession).
- Hebrews 12 makes clear that God disciplines those he loves. For our good and holiness, he will punish the sin we refuse to let go of.
  - Like an expert surgeon, he'll harm us to he'll us.
- The Bible is full of these examples (David and Bathsheba's son dies; Ananias and Saphira are killed in church; Uzziah is struck with leprosy).
- The LS can be medicine for the soul or poison for the body, all depending on how we take it, with arrogance or repentance.

**Avoidance:** <sup>28</sup> Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. <sup>31</sup> But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. <sup>32</sup> But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

- All of this can be avoided with honest self-examination. Rather than judgment, you can receive grace. Some self-correction can avoid disastrous consequences.
- What he is calling us to is **honest self-examination and confession**.
  - Often the hardest person to be honest with is yourself.

- God doesn't want us to come to the LS with perfection (that's impossible) but with **humility, honesty, and faith**.
- "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said 'Repent,' he intended that the entire life of believers should be repentance" (Luther).

**Specific and General:** So the **Corinthians** had a specific application to consider about waiting for others at the table.

- For us the application might be similar but, in all likelihood, will be much different.

## Conclusion

**Directions:** We're about to take the LS as we do each week. It's something we encourage you take only if you're a baptized believer. When we take it, we have an opportunity to fill our hearts and minds with the beauty of the gospel, to recalibrate our lives around the truth of Christ.

- The LS is a comprehensive physical enactment of the gospel that points us to Christ. We look **up** in worship to the throne of God, we look **back** in remembrance of his sacrifice on the cross, we look **forward** in hope of his second coming, look **around** at the church for whom he has died and with whom we will be eternally united at the wedding feast of the lamb, and we look **in** to our own hearts, repenting of our sin.
  - It's the **Lord's** Supper. It's all about him. He sets the agenda.
- Confess your sin. Repent of your sin. Don't suffer alone. Don't harbor sin. (DeVargas and Whitney).