

The Lord's Supper

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[0 : 00] Let us turn in God's word to the passage read from 1 Corinthians chapter 11, verses 17 to 34. And I would like to look at this whole passage with you today.

This letter of Paul was almost certainly written before any of the four Gospels. This is the first inspired written account of the Lord's Supper.

And these may well be the first recorded words of Jesus of Nazareth recorded in the Bible. This is my body, which is for you.

What a debated passage of scripture it has been. People have died for the interpretation of this passage.

Councils have met. Many volumes have been written. Martyrs have burned at the stake over the interpretation of these words.

[1 : 19] One commentator says, probably the history of the world does not furnish a parallel to the controversies occasioned by these simple words.

This is my body. But for most of us, I suspect, it's not a controversial passage. But a passage which takes many of us back to the beginning of our lives.

An especially moving passage. As we come to these verses, we feel that we are on holy ground.

As I hear it read, I go back to early in my childhood. As a little boy on the sacrament Sabbath. And our familiar meeting house did look different.

The central pews were covered in white cloths. At the front was the table of communion. With the cloth and the silver communion vessels.

[2 : 35] The elders were sitting round the table. My two grandfathers were sitting there. One of them a big burly cattle driver.

And the other a small precise grocer. And they were all wearing their communion suits. Black jackets. And pinstripe trousers.

And our minister would stand up. And the sun would come in through the windows of the meeting house. And there was something mysterious.

And beautiful. And sweet about it. And we'd sing. Isle of salvation. Take the cup.

And God's name will I call. And our minister would say. Eat friends. Drink. Yea, drink abundantly.

[3 : 34] Oh beloved. And although I was just a little boy. I felt as Bunyan writes in the pilgrim's progress. Which when I had seen. I wished myself among them.

And yet that solemnity. And that beauty. And all the sacred. And touching associations. Associated with this passage.

Can clothe it. In perhaps a misleading. Romantic air. Because this is a very earthy.

Practical passage. Paul is not setting out here to give us. A complete theology. Of the Lord's Supper. He's writing as a pastor.

To deal. With an embarrassing. Pastoral problem. In the church at Caron. And he does so.

[4 : 36] By going to the heart of the faith. To the depths. Of theology. I hope you know. How wrong it is.

To regard. Doctrine. As impractical. It is the very. Reverse of that. We need to know.

As much. Theology. As we can. That it may help us. And change us. As Christians. And Paul is here.

Dealing. With what is a very. Common. But unrecognized. Obstacle. To our spiritual growth. Individualism.

It's typical. Of the fallen. Human heart. But particularly so. Of the age. In which. We live. Which has been called.

[5 : 36] The century. Of the self. People are wrapped up. In themselves. And that spirit. Has infiltrated. The church. Of Christ.

For. Where for too many. Believers. My almost. Exclusive. Focus. Is on me. When people speak. Of Jesus.

As. My. Personal. Savior. A phrase. That you will not find. In the scriptures. And this thinking. Is not really biblical.

Because biblical. Thinking. Is corporate. It is covenantal. And we need to practice. Seeing ourselves. As part of a group.

Part of a body. The promise is. I will be. Your God. And you. Together. Will be.

[6 : 35] My people. We need to think. Covenantally. To see ourselves. Always. As being.

Part. Of something. Bigger. The people. Of God. And that is where the Lord's Supper. Can be. Peculiarly.

Helpful. And our term. Communion. Is an excellent. Term. A biblical term. A word which means. Sharing.

Or more. Precisely. A common. Participation. A commonality. Having. Someone. Having.

Something. In common. And it is that which we have in common. Which unites us. Which binds us together. And makes us one.

[7 : 31] And our communion. Is not only with God. Through Christ. But is communion. Communion. With. One. Another. And that horizontal.

Aspect. Says Paul. As. Is fundamental. To the meaning. Of the sacrament. So we're going to be thinking this morning about.

Communion. The sharing. The sharing of those. Brought. By Christ's death. Into one. People. There are four paragraphs in this passage.

And in the first. In verses 17. To 22. We have a crisis. In communion. A crisis.

In communion. Paul says. I do not. Commend you. Because. When you come together. It is not for the better.

[8 : 39] But for the worse. What a strong. Stark. Shocking. Shocking. Statement. You leave your services of worship.

Further from God. Than when you come in. Instead of helping you. They're damaging you.

Instead of bringing you closer. They're driving you apart. Your meetings. He says. For worship. And sacrament.

Do more harm. Than good. You would have been better. Not. To have them. That's a serious.

- Statement. God forbid. That that should be true of us. This weekend. That God's verdict.
- [9 : 42] Should be. You've come together. For the worse. Not for the better. He goes on. In verses 18 to 21. When you come together.
- As a church. There are divisions. Among you. In each. In eating. Each one. Goes ahead. With his own meal.
- One goes hungry. Another gets drunk. What's happening here? It's a divided church. They're divided.
- Doctrinally. And racially. And culturally. And certainly. Socially. It's almost certain.
- That they would have met. In the home. Of a rich. Member of the church. There were no church. Buildings. In those days. And the Lord's Supper. Would have been held.
- [10 : 41] At the end. Of an ordinary meal. That appears. And everyone. Brought their own. Food. And the archaeologists. Tell us. That typically. There would be a small.
- Dining room. And then. Outside. And opening. Into the dining room. A larger. Courtyard. The rich people. Would sit together. At the top table.
- As it were. In the dining room. And the poorer people. In the outer area. Some of the members. Of the church. Brought elaborate. Provision.
- Others. Brought. Very little. And it seems. That the supper. Had degenerated. Into an undignified. Scramble.
- People were greedy. People were self-centered. Some were stuffed. With expensive food. Others were starving. And humiliated. And it was in this context.
- [11 : 40] That they observed. The sacrament. And Paul. In holy anger. Says what you're doing. Is a mockery. Verse 20.
- It is not the Lord's supper. That you eat. There is no sharing. There is no communion. There is no sense.
- Of one. Body. Of people. You come to the holiest. Setting. You come to the most. Sacred act.
- Of our faith. And what do we find in there? There is division among you. There is a lack of love. Rather than bringing you closer together.
- The sacrament. Is actually driving you. Farther apart. Verse 22. You despise. The church of God. And humiliate.
- [12 : 39] Those. Who have nothing. Nothing. God. This is the crisis. In communion. God said. You will be my people.
- But at Corinth. Around the table. God didn't have a people. He had a collection of selfish. Isolated. Individuals.
- And there is a poignancy. In Paul's. Repeated use of the verb. Come together. When you come together. Because that is precisely.
- What they weren't doing. Their coming together. Was a lie. Now we may say.
- Well what has that got to do with us? Our communion season. Bears no resemblance. To that. Disorderly. Free for all. At Corinth.
- [13 : 38] But as Charles Hodge comments. With us. The problem may not be. Outward separation. But inward.
- Alienation. Isn't it possible for us. To sit together. And yet. We don't really know.
- One another. We don't really. Care for one another. We cut ourselves off.

We're self-absorbed. We're shy. We're inward looking. We sit together. Physically. As one body.

But how close. Are you. To the people. Beside you. In this meeting house. And worse.

[14 : 39] Isn't it so. That among the people of God. There can be grudges. Grudges. And resentments. And coldness of heart.

Because we do hurt each other. We do wrong each other. And shamefully. We sometimes. Carry those grudges.

We nurse that resentment. My dear friends. Is there anything. Of that. In your heart. To any other person.

In this church. Is there anything. Is there anything. Is there anything. Is there anything. Against somebody. Is there something. Eating at you. Is there a coldness.

Have you ever left. The Lord's table. To gossip. About someone else. Who was there. To point the finger.

[15 : 43] To criticize. Or to judge. And if such happens. Says Paul. It is not.

The Lord's supper. That you eat. You despise. The church. Of God. How often.

Have we gone. Through the motions. And done everything. Correctly. Yet in our hearts. There has been a barrier.

To some fellow communicant. Let a man examine himself. Crisis in communion.

And then. In verses. 23 to 26. We have the creation. Of communion. The creation. Of communion. What makes this.

[16 : 45] Particularly tragic. Is the nature. Of the event. Remembered. And they cannot. Plead ignorance. Paul says. For I received. From the Lord. What I also.

Delivered to you. I taught you this. I set it before you. I explained. You are well. Informed. And he goes on. To describe.

What happened. On the night. When the Lord Jesus. Was betrayed. We know the words. And he declared. The inauguration. Of the new covenant.

In his blood. And he called his disciples. To eat and drink. And he created. A new fellowship. And at the heart. Of the sacrament. Is his giving.

To others. His giving. To others. His sharing. With others. At the center. Of it all. Are the words. For you.

[17 : 41] For you. And this giving. Was at huge. Cost. Not just a piece of bread.

And a sip of wine. This is. This is. My body. This cup. Is the new covenant. In my blood.

He was giving. Himself. To cruel death. The most immense. Gift. In the history. Of the universe. The inexpressible gift.

Greater love. Has no man. Than this. That a man. Lay down. His life. For his friends.

And he says to us. Do this. In remembrance. Of me. We may think. That we would need.

[18 : 42] So. No such. Reminder. How could we ever. Forget. Our Lord Jesus. But he knows. The human heart. We can forget him.

All too easily. He gives us. This sacrament. That we may remember. And in the original. The word. Me. Is stressed.

It is put. In a position. Of great emphasis. Christ says. Remember me. I am the focus. I am the center. It is. It is me.

And remember me. In a particular. Aspect. Of his. Person. And work. This is a memento. It is a memorial. It is a souvenir.

If you like. We buy souvenirs. We try to buy something. That is typical. That is characteristic. Of wherever we have been.

[19 : 43] My wife and I spent a wonderful week. In Paris years ago. And we have a little. Eiffel Tower. And for us. That epitomizes. That describes the city. For us.

It calls it up. Before us. And so our Lord. Leaves us. The bread. And the wine. The body. And the blood. Separated in death.

Remember me. Like this. Says Christ. For as often. As you eat this bread. And drink this cup. You proclaim.

The Lord's death. And Paul is. Highlighting. The contrast. Between their. Failure.

To share. Their food. With one another. And his. Self-giving. Of himself. For them. And he's saying.

[20 : 38] There's a massive. Dislocation here. There's a massive. Incongruity here. He is saying. This is my body.

Which is for you. The Corinthians are saying. This is my food. Which is kept. For me. The two things.

Don't match up. He is saying. Take. Eat. The Corinthians are saying. Keep away.

And stay hungry. Their focus. Is on themselves. His focus. Is on us.

And Paul is saying. This selfishness. This individualism. This lack of care. For one another. This absence of love. How is this.

[21 : 39] Proclaiming the Lord's death. How is this. In remembrance. Of him. It's a contradiction.

Of all he was. All he lived. And died for. By their divisions. By their carelessness. Towards one another. They are denying.

The point. Of Christ's death. To create. Which are caused. By sin. And I think.

There's a poignancy. In Paul. Writing of Jesus. On the night. When he was. Betrayed. And he's saying here.

He is still. Being betrayed. You're. Betraying him. You're coming. To his table. If you don't love. One another.

[22 : 39] You don't care. For one another. It's a betrayal. His communion. This communion. Is created. By his.

Self. Giving. At cost. And that. And that is the only way. In which our communion. May be maintained.

And strengthened. And then that brings us. Thirdly. In verses. In verses. 27 to 32.

To the challenge. Of communion. Therefore. Paul is coming. To his application. To taking.

This. Truth. Of the origin. Of the sacrament. And to earthing it. In the life. Of this specific. Congregation. Therefore. He says. He says.

[23 : 35] If truly. We are to meet. To remember Christ. If that's our goal. To remember him. And worship him. And please him. And trust in him.

And feed on him. And proclaim. His death. Then. Surely. Our behavior. Must parallel. His behavior.

We must act. As we acted. He gave himself. For others. And we must. Give ourselves. To one another.

We cannot come to this table. Saving ourselves. Conduct. Consulting. Ourselves. Suiting. Ourselves. Note his expression. In. An unworthy. Manner. That's a good translation.

- [24 : 35] It's an adverb. Not an adjective. We have too often. Taken it. As an adjective. An adverb. Modifies a verb. An adjective. Qualifies. An adjective. I'm very. Very. Reluctant. To criticize.
- The shorter catechism. When I was 14. In Sabbath school. I got a Bible. For repeating. The shorter catechism. Without a mistake. Because if there was one thing I would change.
- There was one adjective. The unworthy. Receivers. The unworthy. Receivers. Because Paul doesn't say that.
- We are unworthy. We are unworthy. We are always unworthy. And as Alexander Wright says.
- [25 : 36] A sense. Of utter. Unworthiness. Is one mark of worth. In a communicant. But Paul says. Not come worthy. But come. Worthily. We tend to apply this word. To the character. Of the communicant.
- And say. Am I worthy. That's not what Paul says. He says. Are you coming. Worthily. Are you coming. In a worthy way.
- He's not talking about our character. He's not talking about our standing. He's talking about the way in which we come. The way we eat and drink.
- Our attitude. Our mindset. Our behavior at the table. Our understanding of what is happening. He says.
- [26 : 32] Go back to the upper room. Look at your Savior. Listen to his words. Enter the experience of that night.
- Go with him to Calvary. Meditate on the Son of God. Who loved me. And gave himself. Gave himself. For me.
- And let that vision grip you. And master you. And change you. And then look at the people. Who are sitting beside you.
- Who are they. Who are they. The people.
- And the Lord Jesus Christ. Has loved. From all eternity. From before the creation of the world.
- [27 : 31] That man. That woman. Sitting beside you at the table. Before the universe was made. He loved them. And he died for them on the cross.
- And he died. Loving them. He's coming again. To receive them. And you're going to be with them.
- To all eternity. God. That's who we are together. Let a person examine himself.

And so let him eat. Of the bread. And drink of the cup. God judges those. Who disregard the unity. of the covenant community who disregard the needs of the covenant community who do not care for each other who do not love each other who do not give themselves at cost to one another that is why many of you are weak and ill guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord discerning the body means that we come worthily that we understand what our blessed saviour did for us and what that means for how we treat one another and how we regard one another and that leads lastly in verses 33 and 34 to commitment to communion this isn't highfalutin or flowery it is very simple very low key and yet intensely practical and potentially far reaching and transforming verse 33 when you come together to eat wait for one another wait for one another think of one another love one another serve one another come as a body come as one people come as a community let it be true sharing in Christ my friends this is the mandate of scripture we are bound to put aside every barrier to fellowship you are bound says Paul to do all you can to help your fellow believers we remember Christ by following his example of costly self-giving the world is looking for this people are lonely they're isolated they want to belong this is the attraction of the cults this is the attraction of the pub and so often in the church there's coldness and there's remoteness and people are wrapped up in themselves and their own interests and their own concerns and it's a practical denial of Christ the church was created by the sacrifice of Christ and it is kept healthy by the sacrifice of his people and we need to take it to heart that division in a church division among Christians

is something that cries out to heaven God forgive us we've got used to it we accept it we joke about it for two believers to be at variance it's a dreadful thing it's a dreadful thing it's something to make the angels weep and the devils cheer we profess to be Christians we hope we believe that we have been forgiven we're followers of Christ what did our Lord

[33 : 21] Jesus do? he gave himself for others and we have to do the same we have to forgive one another we have to put away every grudge every resentment we have to repent of our coldness we have to shake ourselves out of these things we have to look at each other with new eyes the church is to be a place where there is a supernatural love a love so startling so profound so all embracing that the world looks at it and says see how these people love one another we have to determine whatever it costs me I will love my brothers and sisters in this place and I will tell them

I love them and I will show them I love them and if I have to forgive them seventy times seven I'll do it and God in his sovereign grace comes to us and he says you cannot stop me loving you and we have to say that to one another and we have to act it out you cannot stop me loving you and we have to be willing to sacrifice our prejudices and our legitimate preferences and our interests for the sake of our brothers and sisters that we may be one and that's a witness too often lacking do you remember what our Lord said by this all people will know that you are my disciples if you have loved one to another and to such self giving the sacrament is a profound and beautiful witness for you for you and how can I take the bread and wine and not live for him and for you

Amen let us pray O Lord God you who know all things we believe that in great measure we do love our brothers and sisters in Christ but often we fail to show it or to express it and we confess that all too often we are self-centered and we are slow to forgive and we are insensitive and we do not notice those who are needy who really need our help

O God we pray that as we come to the table of him who loved us and who gave himself for us that we may come as his true disciples his followers Father we are called to lay down our lives for our friends and we are ashamed of the times when we are not willing to make even the smallest sacrifice for our friends forgive us O God and pour out upon us we pray that love with which Christ has loved us that we may love one another that the world may believe that you have sent him Father we pray that we may each examine ourselves and in these coming hours that we may repent of any harshness of any enmity of any coldness which we have cherished in our hearts that we may be at peace with our brothers and sisters and so may receive your blessing we pray it in the name of him who loved us and gave himself for us and for his sake

Amen