

MESSAGE TITLE: The Lord's Supper, part 3

SCRIPTURE: I Corinthians 11:17-33

KEY TRUTH

This morning, we will observe the Lord's Supper as a church family. Our desire is to fellowship with one another as a celebration of the work of Jesus to save us.

GETTING STARTED

At Jesus' institution of the Lord's Supper with His disciples, the bread and cup were part of a meal. The bread was probably broken near the beginning and the cup was taken at the end. By the time Paul wrote his letter to the Corinthian church, the Lord's Supper was celebrated in two stages which consolidated the partaking of the bread and the cup at the end of a communal meal. What bothered Paul about the Corinthian celebration was that the meal had become an occasion not marked by love for fellow believers but one of self-centered indulgence. The church was divided at a celebration meant to express unity. Paul encouraged believers to examine themselves before partaking in the Lord's Supper in order to make things right with fellow believers they had offended by their own selfishness.

OBSERVATION

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 11:17-22.

According to Paul, in what ways were the Corinthians missing the mark when they observed the Lord's Supper?

What effect did this have on the unity of the church?

How would you describe the scene if you were observing these believers taking the Lord's Supper at the Corinthian church?

What does their observance of the Lord's Supper reveal about their attitudes toward one another? Read verse 22 for insight.

When the Christians in Corinth gathered to celebrate the Lord's Supper, they lost sight of its purpose. There was little unity. The wealthy members refused to share their food. Some had even turned the Lord's Table into a drunken party. Ultimately, the divisions among the Corinthian believers were dishonoring to God. Because real love involves the whole family of God, Paul would not allow such division to continue.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

Jesus first instituted the Lord's Supper as a way for His disciples to come together and remember His sacrifice on their behalf. When Jesus died and rose again, He united all believers together under the banner of His name. To help the Corinthians understand this reality, Paul reminds them of Jesus' own words.

What do relationships with other believers communicate to the world about our relationships with Christ?

What do the bread and wine represent? What is their significance?

Read Matthew 26:26-28. Why did Jesus choose to institute this meal for believers during Passover? How is the Lord's Supper different from the Passover? What was Jesus trying to teach the disciples?

Jesus chose to institute the Lord's Supper within the context of the Passover meal to intentionally connect those two events. The Israelites celebrated Passover to remember the Lord's deliverance from the Egyptians. This redemption was only momentary; however, Jesus' work on the cross has an eternal effect.

Paul mentions that when we partake in the Lord's Supper we "proclaim the Lord's death until He comes" (v. 26). What do you think Paul meant by this?

Read 1 Corinthians 11:27-33.

How does one incur guilt regarding the Lord's Supper, according to verse 27?

What does Paul encourage believers to do to avoid incurring judgment?

What is the purpose of the Lord's judgment according to verse 32?

Why is it important that we examine ourselves before taking the Lord's Supper? Read verse 29. What is the result of not taking the time to look at your own life before taking communion?

Paul encouraged the Corinthians to examine themselves before they took communion. When the church is unified as they gather together, it shows the world an outward picture of the gospel. Paul ends this section of the letter with language indicating a family relationship with Corinthian believers. The church is the household of God (1 Timothy 3:15). Regardless of gender or economic status, every believer should be treated with dignity and respect.

Why do we celebrate the Lord's Supper as a church family, and not as individuals?

How does the Lord's Supper encourage biblical community? Have you experienced this?

APPLICATION

Read Psalm 139:23-24. Take time today to lift this prayer to God for yourself. Ask God to show you if you need to seek reconciliation with another brother or sister. Ask Him to grant you the courage and strength to admit you were wrong and to seek forgiveness from the person you have wronged.

How is the church gathering together for the Lord's Supper an act of worship? Do you personally see the Lord's Supper as an act of worship or a religious formality?

How could you use the practice of the Lord's Supper to share the gospel with someone who needs to hear it? Who in your life might need to hear it this week?

Based on Paul's instructions in this passage, what practices could you put into place prior to taking the Lord's Supper?

PRAYER

As you close in prayer, thank God for His sacrifice on our behalf. Ask God that He would make our church into a united family of believers. Pray that He would grant deep relationships among all our members and ask that He would protect us from division and disunity. Ask Him to help us make things right with others when we sin against them. Pray for the strength and courage we need to admit our sins and to seek forgiveness, for the sake of unity.

COMMENTARY NOTES

11:17. In the preceding section, Paul had begun with words of praise. But here he said, I have no praise for you. Paul's disgust with the Corinthians focused on how their meetings, or public worship gatherings, did more harm than good. Paul did not condemn them absolutely and categorically—he had already praised them for holding to many of his teachings on worship (11:2). Yet, his assessment was that the harm of their worship times outweighed the good. What kinds of things would yield this kind of condemnation? The Corinthians had corrupted one of the most sacred events in Christian worship: The Lord's Supper. They had not given due regard to the honor of Christ, nor had they honored or edified one another in the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

11:18. Paul began with in the first place, but never moved on to a second or third matter. His words should be understood to mean “the most important way this is true is.” He also added, I hear. Paul's criticism was that there were divisions among the Corinthians, but he had already addressed this issue extensively in chapters 1 through 4. Here, he focused on the divisions that existed when the Corinthians came together as a church. Paul's chief concern was that divisions perverted public worship.

11:20. Paul addressed directly the issue at hand. When the Corinthian believers came together to celebrate the Lord's Supper, divisions so corrupted it that it could not be called the Lord's Supper. Although this terminology is common in the church today, this passage contains the only expression of the phrase “Lord's Supper” in the New Testament.

11:21. Paul explained his remark by describing the report he had received. As the Corinthians ate, each of them went ahead without waiting for anybody else. This phrase each of you goes ahead may be translated as “each one takes his own supper.” Some in

the church had lost the corporate aspect of the ritual and had come to focus mainly on themselves. In their meals, the Corinthians favored the privileged and rich. If the Lord's Supper was observed in Corinthian homes, the rich and powerful may have been allowed to eat first. Since one remained hungry while another got drunk, they obviously ate and drank to excess. This would have been bad enough, but they magnified the harm by leaving nothing for the others.

11:22. Paul began his correction by asking several questions. First, he asked if they did not have houses in which to eat and drink ordinary meals. Second, Paul expressed the evil of this practice by asking those who abused the poor if they despised the church of God. The church consists of those people gathered out of the world because they belong to God. Third, Paul asked if the rich members of the Corinthian church actually wanted to humiliate those who had nothing. The poor of the ancient world were mocked and humiliated by the wealthy. Sarcastically, Paul asked if they thought he should praise them for their behavior. He then answered Certainly not!

11:23-24. Paul explained that he could not praise the Corinthians for their behavior because they had failed to observe the teachings about the Lord's Supper he had passed on to them. Paul next described how to observe the Lord's Supper. These instructions are so simple and straightforward that they appear abbreviated. Paul revealed the proper way to observe the Lord's Supper by recounting how the Lord Jesus Himself had observed it on the night He was betrayed. Four verbal ideas described the activities surrounding the bread: took bread; had given thanks; broke it; and said. Jesus took bread, that is, He picked it up. Therefore, the breaking of the loaf portrayed the breaking of Christ's body.

11:25. Paul turned next to the cup. He noted the parallel between the distributions of the bread and of the cup by saying that the latter occurred in the same way. Whereas 11:23-24 mention talking, thanking, breaking, and speaking, 11:25 mentions taking and speaking. Paul emphasized by repetition the one element that was absent from every Gospel account: Do this ... in remembrance of me. Paul saw the honor and remembrance of Christ as central to the Lord's Supper.

Paul's record of Jesus' words closely parallels Luke's account. The main point is that the wine represents the New Covenant in Jesus' blood. The expression "New Covenant" derives from Jeremiah 31:31. In this passage the prophet Jeremiah described the covenant arrangement that God would make with the remnant of His people after they returned from exile. Ezekiel and Isaiah called the same restoration covenant the "covenant of peace" (see Isa. 54:10; Ezek. 37:26). Paul also reported that Jesus defined the New Covenant in terms of His blood. Christ's sacrificial death paid the debt for sin. His death made it possible for people to enjoy forgiveness and new life in Him. The expression "in my blood" recalls the importance of blood rituals in covenant-making. Not every covenant in the Bible is connected to sacrificial blood, but blood sacrifice has been the way of good standing before God from the earliest times (see Gen. 4:4; Heb. 9:22).

Echoing what He said about the bread, Jesus exhorted His disciples, Drink it, in remembrance of me. The main purpose of the Lord's Supper is to draw the participants' attention to the centrality of Christ's saving work on their behalf. The importance of this motif for Paul is evident from the fact that Paul repeated it three times.

11:26. Paul closed his account of the institution of the Lord's Supper with an explanation of his unique repetition of the remembrance of Christ. Why should eating and drinking in the Lord's Supper focus on the remembrance of Christ? It is because whenever the church participates in the Lord's Supper, Christians proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. The expression proclaim occurs many times in the New Testament to describe the ministry of the church to the unbelieving world. It is the prophetic announcement to those outside the church that Christ is the only way of salvation. When the world sees the church eating and drinking in order to remember the significance of Christ's body and blood, the word of the gospel is made visible.

11:27. Whenever people participate in the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner, they are actually guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. To participate in the table in an unworthy manner has traditionally been interpreted broadly to mean to participate while having unconfessed sin. The unworthiness he had in mind was participating in the Lord's Supper in a way that failed to exhibit the unity of the church in Christ.

11:28-29. In general, the Lord's Supper should be a time of celebration in which Christians focus on Christ's honor, the church's unity, and the proclamation of the gospel. The focus should be on others, not on oneself. It is only in the preparation for the Lord's Supper that individuals must turn their attention inward.

11:30. Paul continued explaining the seriousness of violating the Lord's Supper by pointing out the judgment the Corinthians were experiencing because of their failure to observe the Lord's Supper properly. He wrote, many among you are weak and sick. Paul probably received information about illnesses in the church from messengers sent to him. Second, he remarked, a number of you have fallen asleep. Some in the church had died because of God's judgment against them because of their sin against the body of Christ.

11:31-32. Paul added the comment that if the Corinthians judged themselves, they would not come under judgment. In other words, if the Corinthians took time to evaluate themselves before the Lord's Supper and changed their actions based on this evaluation, God would not judge them with sickness and death.

11:33-34. Paul closed this section with a general summation, giving some final instructions. He appealed to the Corinthians with familial affection by calling them his brothers. Paul yearned for them to turn from this serious sin. To avoid God's judgment, they needed to do two things. First, they needed to wait for each other. Instead of the rich eating first and the poor not eating at all, all participants in the feast were to eat at

the same time. Second, to eliminate any justification for not waiting for others, Paul added that anyone who was hungry should eat at home.

Why should this practical advice be followed? If the church would gather for the Lord's Supper in harmony and mutual consideration, then their meetings would not result in judgment. The discipline that God was inflicting on the church would cease because the Corinthians would have begun to celebrate the Lord's Supper in a way that pleased God, honored Christ, respected the church's unity, and proclaimed the gospel.

SOURCES CONSULTED

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www.smallgroups.com

Serendipity Bible for Groups

The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament