

The Lord's Supper

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[0 : 0 0] Well, this morning we are going to partake of the Lord's Table again. That'll be the focus of our service. And so I thought it'd be appropriate to spend some time this morning deepening our understanding of the Lord's Table.

What are we doing as we eat and drink from this table? And why do we do this? So we're opening our Bibles this morning to 1 Corinthians 11, verse 17.

Now, this letter was written by the Apostle Paul to the church at Corinth. It's estimated that he wrote this letter about 20 years after Jesus ascended into heaven and about four or five years after this church here in Corinth was established.

So this is a relatively young church. Paul has some words of encouragement for them. He commends them for some things and gives them instructions. But if you're familiar with this letter that Paul has written, he also offers them many words of correction.

There were quite a few things that they were doing there in the church at Corinth that were unfitting to their profession of faith in Jesus. And so Paul, having got word of these things, is writing partially to address some of them.

[1 : 1 6] And one of these things where the Corinthian Christians have been failing is their observance of the Lord's Supper. So let's listen to what Paul had to say to them here in 1 Corinthians 11, verse 17.

He writes, In the following directives, I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you.

And to some extent, I believe it. No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval. So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat.

For when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another gets drunk. Don't you have homes to eat and drink in?

Or do you despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? Certainly not in this matter.

[2 : 2 7] It must have been hard for the Corinthians to hear these words of Paul the Apostle. Just moments ago, back up in verse 2, Paul said this to them.

He said, I praise you for remembering me and everything and for holding fast to the traditions just as I pass them on to you. So it's not all bad. They have been doing many things well.

They've been holding fast to these traditions that Paul has passed on to them. And Paul commends them for that. He praises them for that. But now when it comes to this thing of how they observe the Lord's Supper, Paul says, I have no praise for you.

In fact, he says, your meetings do more harm than good. They are for the worse, not the better. Man, that must have been hard for them to hear.

Now, Paul isn't saying that it would be better for them not to meet. Rather, it's what they're doing when they meet together that's resulting in harm. And we'll see what kind of harm in a moment.

[3 : 31] In verse 18, Paul brings up one major cause or root issue here. He says that he is aware of the divisions that are among them.

They are a divided church. Now, Paul's already brought this up and said a lot about this earlier in the letter. But it seems to come out here that these divisions are along certain lines. Look at verse 22.

Verse 22. Do you despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing? So it seems that not only were there divisions and factions about who's following who in the church, there was also division between wealthy and poor in the church.

Those who have and those who have nothing. More about that in a moment. Paul does, in verse 19, acknowledge that there is a legitimate reason to have divisions.

It does make sense that if some are not living in obedience to Christ, not walking by the Spirit, it will put them at odds with others who are in the church. There will be a bit of a divide there.

[4 : 44] But now Paul brings to the forefront what exactly it is that they are doing which is causing harm in the church. He says, So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat.

For when you're eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another person gets drunk.

That's pretty serious. It may also sound a little strange to us. When we do the Lord's Table, we do it so differently today in our culture.

But it seems from the passage here that when they gathered to have the Lord's Supper, they would not just pass around a little piece of bread and cup like we do, but they would have a full meal. A church meal.

Perhaps a celebratory banquet. After all, the Lord's Supper was done the first time by Jesus with his disciples at Passover. It was done around a table.

[5 : 46] It was a full meal. And it was a celebration kind of meal. But what started out as a very Christ-honoring celebration for the Corinthians has now turned into something ugly.

Something very hurtful. Even spiritually damaging to the church. So much so that Paul says, it is not the Lord's Supper that you are eating.

Wow. So what are they doing wrong? Paul says that some of them are going ahead with their own private suppers, leaving others to go hungry. Some of them are getting drunk, while others, it seems, are getting nothing.

How could this be? It seems here that part of the divisions are along these lines of those who have much and those who have very little or nothing. Probably the church was gathering at this time in the home of a wealthy person who had the means to host the gathering and the space and to put on the meal.

And many of the wealthy either wouldn't need to work or if they did work, they could get the day off or they could get off a little earlier from work. They could be there nice and early for the celebration.

[7 : 05] But those who were poor likely worked most of the day. Or if they were slaves, they couldn't leave until they were allowed to by their master to come and participate. The picture here, as we get, is that they did their best to get there when they could.

And it seems to be a case of wealth and privilege in which the wealthy just decided to go ahead with the meal. Start eating and drinking.

Not everybody had even showed up yet. So that by the time those who were poor arrived, there was nothing left. And those who had gone ahead were drunk.

Can you imagine this? You show up to a church potluck. You just get down into the basement. You got there as soon as you could.

And every dish, every bowl is empty. And there's a group of people over there in the other room and they're drunk. Man, that must have hurt.

[8 : 10] The wonder Paul is livid. He rebukes them very sharply. He says, Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? This is meant to be a special meal by which we remember Jesus Christ.

The purpose of this meal is not just to eat and get full, to party and have a good time. Essentially, what he's saying is if you're hungry, eat at home before you come.

That way, there will be enough to go around for everybody. Paul will echo this again down in verse 34. He says, Anyone who is hungry should eat something at home so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment.

More about that word judgment later. I was trying to think of how I could put this in modern terms. Imagine that you were invited to a wedding and the time came for the speeches and the toasts.

People to stand up and to say things to honor the bride and the groom. But then when someone goes to ask those serving the drink to top up everybody's glass, they tell you, embarrassed, that there's nothing left.

[9 : 23] Why? Because a group of guests snuck into the back room where the alcohol was being kept and they pounded it all back until they were sloshed. Can you imagine that?

This is outrageous. It's totally out of sync with the whole purpose of the occasion. Paul asks the rhetorical question, do you despise the church of God?

In other words, speaking to those who are going ahead and getting drunk, what you're doing, your behavior, it shows utter contempt for God's people and for the gathering of his people.

Do you shame those who have nothing? Says Paul. What you're doing is humiliating those brothers and sisters in Christ who either don't have the freedom to get there earlier or don't have the means to bring anything when they come.

Maybe they're barely able to put food on their own table. He says, shall I praise you? Certainly not in this matter. So Paul has exposed what they are doing that is wrong, that is harmful.

[10 : 44] And now he's going to tell them about what the Lord's Supper is all about. Verse 23. He says, For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you.

The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 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. In the same way, after supper, he took the cup, saying, This cup is the new covenant in my blood.

Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me. For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, says Paul, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

So Paul is trying to reground them. There are times when traditions that we hold to drift so far away from the reason they were started that they no longer reflect the true purpose of the occasion.

[11 : 54] So what does Paul do? He takes them back to the source. Back to the very night that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper to remind them of what it's all about.

Paul says, For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you. Paul wasn't at the table on the night of Jesus' betrayal. In fact, he didn't even become a follower of Jesus until after Jesus had ascended into heaven.

So we might wonder, how does Paul know what happened on the night of Jesus' betrayal? How the Lord's Supper should be done? Paul says, I received what I'm about to tell you from the Lord, from Jesus himself.

In other words, Jesus spoke to the Apostle Paul just like he spoke to the other Apostles after he had ascended to heaven. And Jesus told Paul exactly what he did and said with the other Apostles on the night of his betrayal.

This is direct, special revelation. It's not just Paul's guess at what happened based on something that Peter had told him. No, Jesus is the source here.

[13 : 04] Jesus told it to Paul and then Paul explained it and passed it along to the Corinthians. And what did Jesus do and say?

Paul tells us that Jesus took bread. He gave thanks. He prayed and thanked God for it. And then he broke the bread into pieces.

And Jesus said he did this while saying this is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

So on the night of his betrayal Jesus gave the disciples a picture, a metaphor using that bread that was in his hands. He broke it which symbolized his death.

And then he passed out the pieces of the bread to all the disciples at the table which symbolizes that they are to benefit. They are to receive something from his death.

[14 : 11] Now Paul doesn't explain all of the symbolism here to the Corinthians but Jesus did explain it when he taught the crowds in John chapter 6. just as bread is something that sustains and gives life to the body in the same way Jesus' death his body broken will bring life to them.

And so Jesus says this is my body which is for you. In other words me dying on the cross it's for you.

it's for you my disciples. You are to benefit from what's going to happen tomorrow. Similarly Paul explains what Jesus did with the cup.

Verse 25 after the supper he took the cup and he said this cup is the new covenant in my blood. And again Paul doesn't explain exactly what that means.

There's a lot of symbolism here but we know it from what the other gospel writers recorded and what it says in other places in the Bible. The idea here is that Jesus' death will inaugurate will bring about a new deal a new arrangement between God and man.

[15 : 36] We could take a whole series of sermons just to understand all that there is to this new covenant relationship. how it compares with the old covenant but basically to sum it up Jesus by his death is about to offer the ultimate sacrifice to atone for sins so that people can be forgiven completely and forever of all the wrongs that they have done and become permanent citizens in God's kingdom members of his family members of his household people who will inherit eternal life and all the good things that God has been promising to his people since the very beginning.

Essentially Jesus is saying my death my blood is about to open up that new arrangement that new relationship between God and you.

that's what this meal the Lord's supper is all about says Paul it's about Jesus and his death and what his death gives and brings to you and in the midst of this Paul really presses home why we should observe the Lord's supper what's the reason that we're to do this the first reason he gives is because Jesus commanded it do this said Jesus do this whenever you drink it and the sense we get from Jesus words when he says whenever you drink it we get the sense that he didn't mean just do it one time right here right now in remembrance of me no he meant as an ongoing regular thing from now on when you do this do it in remembrance of me

Paul's highlighting the fact that Jesus deliberately gave them a tradition he commanded them to do this thing with bread and cup not just once but again and again repeatedly that's why sometimes we call it an ordinance because it's something he ordained something he commanded us to do and for what purpose Jesus is that the purpose was to remember him do this in remembrance of me drink it in remembrance remembrance of me this thing that we're to do it's a memorial it's a it's a thing we're doing to remember Jesus and his death so we observe the

Lord's table because Jesus commanded it we observe the Lord's table to remember Jesus and then Paul throws in a third reason in verse 26 he says for whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes I really like these words of Paul because I spend a lot of my time up here preaching but there's a sense in which every one of us is called to be a preacher Paul tells us here that we are to be preachers of the gospel we are to preach the death of Jesus it's to be something that we proclaim and declare each one of us who believes again and again by eating and drinking this bread and this cup we're to keep doing that until the Lord returns so this is that third purpose to proclaim the

[19 : 50] Lord's death to proclaim our faith in it our acceptance of it our love of what he did for us we're to keep this proclamation going until the risen Lord Jesus returns let me just recap Paul gives three reasons why we should observe the Lord's supper repeatedly again and again as followers of Christ number one Jesus commanded us to do it number two it's to remember him it's as a remembrance of him and number three it's to proclaim his death the gospel the good news until he comes and in that third one there is a sense in which declaring it it's a way that we can personally put our trust and our faith in the gospel again and again continually but there's also a public sense too in which what we're doing is declaring the gospel to the world who is watching so now we're starting to see the problem with how the

Corinthians are doing the Lord's supper or if we go with Paul's words how they're failing to observe the Lord's supper the Lord's supper is meant to be focused on Jesus and what his death has accomplished for us but here in Corinth their practice of it has degenerated it's drifted away from that into a sacrilegious party time where the rich eat and drink themselves into a drunken stupor in the name of Jesus while the poor and needy among them are left out and humiliated and so we expect that Paul's about to tell us quite strongly how God feels about this wicked thing happening in the church and he does verse 27 Paul says so then whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the

Lord now we're getting even closer to the heart of why their gatherings are doing more harm than good Paul just says it bluntly and clearly he spells out the full implications of their behaviors these people who are going ahead and getting drunk and leaving people out they're eating and drinking this very special meal in an unworthy manner says Paul and by doing so they are sinning against the very body and blood of Jesus himself wow now there is some discussion about this statement what does it mean to sin against the body and blood of the Lord some have suggested maybe you've heard this that sinning against the body of the Lord means sinning against the people of the Lord because there are places in the scriptures where the people of the Lord are referred to as the body of

Christ while this idea has some sense to it especially in this passage with how they've been treating their fellow Corinthians within the local body I don't think this is what Paul means first of all they're not just guilty of sinning against the body of the Lord they're also in the same breath guilty of sinning against the blood of the Lord the body and blood of the Lord stand together as one as what they're guilty of sinning against further it's the physical body of Jesus and the physical blood of Jesus that's in view here Paul just talked about how Jesus said this is my body this cup is the covenant in my blood those are the things in view so what does it mean that they will be guilty of the body and blood of the

Lord well this is a hard question to answer is Paul saying that they will somehow share personally in the guilt of crucifying Jesus or is he saying that they will be guilty of treating the body and blood of the Lord as unholy I have to tell you I don't know the answer but whatever this means this seems by the description to be almost the most serious kind of guilt that a person can have we'll skip over verse 28 and come back to it in a moment but let's keep the flow of Paul's logic here with verse 29 Paul says for those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves again I don't think this means that they fail to remember the other people of the body of Christ with whom they're eating the context and the flow of Paul's argument points the other direction it's that they fail to recognize what the elements the bread and the cup represent that the bread represents the body of Jesus himself broken as he died on the cross the problem is that they're partaking flippantly cavalierly they're getting drunk on the wine they're partaking of these symbolic elements at this special meal without a sincere personal regard for the body and blood of Jesus the one who died to save them and so what does

[25 : 43] Paul say here he says whoever eats the bread and drinks the cup in this manner eats and drinks judgment on themselves wow this is serious God does take it personally when people sin against him and this sin what these Corinthians are doing is so wicked so grievous to God that God brings disciplinary judgment on them listen to this he says for those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves that is why many among you are weak and sick and a number of you have fallen asleep fallen asleep is a euphemism here for have died do you hear this Paul is saying that right now some of the

Corinthians are weak sick even have died as disciplinary judgment because of how they've been sinning against the body and blood of the Lord Jesus when they gather to observe the Lord's supper this right here is I think what Paul had in mind when he said earlier that he had no praise for them and that their meetings are doing more harm than good not only are they harming each other but they're harming themselves spiritually they're bringing on themselves the disciplinary judgment of God now it's very important here that we distinguish between what I'll call punitive judgment and disciplinary judgment this judgment this consequence comes on them not as punishment for their sins but as a form of discipline listen to what Paul says in verse 32 he says nevertheless when we are judged in this way by the Lord we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world amazingly if we belong to

Christ then Jesus death on the cross for us has so truly and finally atoned for our sins that even when we do such terrible things as this what these Corinthians are doing it doesn't take away our salvation we don't lose it it doesn't make us liable to eternal punishment rather God brings this form of judgment upon them as a means of correction for those who are sick and weak to teach them how they ought to be living that they shouldn't be living this way they should be living this way it's to bring them to repentance for those who have died perhaps it's to keep them from continuing to do this things that they've been doing spiritual harm to themselves and others now I know as soon as we get into this it raises some big questions some of you might be thinking this does God bring this same form of disciplinary judgment on all his children even me sickness weakness even death if we sin against God well this is much debated other passages such as

Hebrews chapter 12 talk about how God disciplines all of his children for their good allowing things like hardship in our lives in order to train us to live righteously but I would urge caution here I think we should be slow to draw a principle here about how God usually or always works in the lives of his children first of all this thing some of the Corinthians are doing is especially grievous it's hurtful to the whole church it's sacrilegious it dishonors the name of Christ it treats something very special and holy as if it were profane and unholy could it be that God reserves this severity of discipline for those who are willfully and repeatedly committing the worst of sins perhaps another angle here or another question we could ask is should we always be looking at the bad stuff that happens to us as God judging us for particular sins well we know from the story of Job that God sometimes allows bad stuff to happen to us for other purposes even when we haven't sinned it's possible to go through this Christian life always worried always afraid always assuming that everything that happens to us that's bad is God judging us or even punishing us for our sins but as I said before the truth is that Jesus already took the full punishment for our sins on the cross when he died he made full atonement for us that's the good news and so I would say rather than always worrying or wondering whether the bad things that happen to us in life are God bringing this sort of judgment on you or on someone else simply make it your aim to please the Lord to live in a way that honors him to be obedient to him to love one another as he has commanded and if we keep that humble and responsive heart towards

God thinking carefully about how we are living we don't need the Lord's disciplinary judgment on our lives at least not like this I think this is what Paul means in verse 31 when he says but if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves we would not come under such judgment so I want to encourage you with this these sober words I want to encourage you to let these words put some fear of God into your heart enough that it makes you think twice about doing something you know is wicked God will not allow you to sin and sin and sin and just go on doing it willfully without any thought to it with no consequence but at the same time remember that God loves you he is for you that's why he sent Christ and he will bring what discipline or correction you need at the time that you need it so that you have that outcome that we all desire so that we will not be finally condemned with the world final salvation so this is not a message of damnation it's a warning of God's grace it's a message of mercy finally Paul here at the end tells them what they should do as they observe this special meal the Lord's supper and he gets fairly practical verse 28 he says everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup this is why we often give everyone a few minutes of quiet before we pass out the elements it's a chance to reflect and pray it's a chance to think about how your week went about how you're doing with the

[33 : 37] Lord to confess your sins to him again to put your heart in a right place so that we're not eating this bread and drinking this cup in a flippant manner we want to be fully conscious of what we are doing of what these elements represent as we take them verse 33 Paul says so then my brothers and sisters when you gather to eat you should all eat together quite literally he says when gathering to eat wait for one another this is one of the reasons I always say we will wait until everyone has been served and then we will eat and drink together we won't want to be just thinking about ourselves this is the place where we see the the most selfless loving act in the universe what Christ did for us how ironic if we would wouldn't even wait for each other to be served to get there to the meal before we partake there's so much we could go into to apply all this to ourselves we could think about other ways that we're selfish and rude like these wealthy

Corinthians we could think about how we might promote division in our church or how we might discriminate against those who are different by our attitudes and behaviors we could think about ways that we could show this kind of love and consideration in our context but I'm going to leave all that to you for your own personal prayerful reflection later on we want to move now to the Lord's Supper and partake of it again and so I want to end by pointing us as Paul did to that main thing that this supper is all about this table this meal is all about Jesus and his death for us and why did he have to die for us because we sinned we did things that are wrong things for which we deserve punishment but at the cross we know and believe that Jesus offered himself as the sacrifice that takes away our guilt he took that punishment that we deserve on himself so now we have all of us who believe a right standing with God this is the most precious gift in all of life it's a gift worth remembering and so let's partake again of the table to remember

Jesus and what he did for us as usual we'll have a couple minutes of quiet prayer and reflection examine yourselves before you eat and drink discern recognize what this bread and this cup represent the body and blood of the Lord Jesus given for you after a few minutes of that we'll have our elders come forward and they will serve the bread and the cup if you believe in Jesus and your heart is right before the Lord today then I invite you to join with us remember Christ with us and partake if not please abstain for you've heard the warning of Christ's apostle about partaking in an unworthy manner we'll wait until everyone has been served and then we'll eat and drink together endure and

Thank you.

Thank you.

[38 : 37] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[41 : 07] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[43 : 37] Thank you. Thank you.

Father in heaven, thank you so much for your great love. Thank you.

Thank you.