

Examine yourself

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[0:00] We're going to have our first reading now, which is from Jeremiah. This is Jeremiah 31, page 798 in my Bible.

So Jeremiah 31, starting to read at verse 31. Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord.

But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord. I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for they shall all know me. From the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord.

For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more. So we read from chapter 11, verses 17 through to 34 on page 1154 of the Church Bibles.

[1:25] 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.

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, for there must be factions among you, in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized.

When you come together, it is not for the Lord's supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk.

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. 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.

[2:35] 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 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. And as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

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.

Let a person examine himself then. And so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.

That is why many of you are weak and ill and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged.

[3:42] But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.

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.

Well, Val, thanks so much indeed for reading for us. Why don't I pray before we look at 1 Corinthians chapter 11 together. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we praise you again very much for the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thank you that he is indeed your servant king. The one who came to serve, the one who humbled himself. Yet as well, the one who was raised from the dead, is alive today, is Lord and returning. And we pray, therefore, that as we hear your word, not only read, but now proclaimed, please would you humble us and help us to accept your words as the words of the living God.

[4:56] For Jesus' sake, amen. Well, I give them this series of talks in 1 Corinthians 11 to 14, the title, Following Jesus in a Selfie Culture.

Because ours is a culture which is increasingly self-obsessed, just like 1st century Corinth. But of course, because we're immersed in it, then so often we don't see it.

We don't see how being self-centered and profoundly self-centered actually is the norm in our culture. Until, that is, you come across a letter like this one, which is in the paper recently.

Dear Sir, I haven't got a computer, but I was told about Facebook and Twitter, and I'm trying to make friends outside Facebook and Twitter while applying the same principles. Every day I walk down the street and tell passers-by what I've eaten, how I feel, what I've done the night before, and what I'll do for the rest of the day.

I've given them pictures of my wife, my daughter, my dog, and me gardening and on holiday, spending time by the pool. I also listen to their conversations. I tell them I like them and give them my opinion on every subject that interests me, regardless of whether it interests them or not.

[6:10] And it works. I already have four people following me. Two police officers, a social worker, and a psychiatrist.

At which point, I guess we're meant to stop, aren't we? And just kind of think, actually, am I relating to people in a wise, appropriate manner online? Well, the point of 1 Corinthians 11, 17 to 34, is a profound challenge, certainly to the church in Corinth, and I think to us as well, about how we relate to each other as a church family.

Online, of course, but mainly offline in our real relationships. We can see the whole focus is still the church gathering, verse 17, what they do in their church meetings.

But what a shocking verse, verse 17 is. But in the following instructions, I do not commend you, because when you come together, it is not for the better, but for worse.

So, you see, imagine that Sir Vicky had sent out an email this last week to everyone in the church family, saying that actually the church council had been reviewing our Sunday services, and had decided it would be better if we stopped meeting, because they were doing more harm than good.

[7:31] It would be quite something, wouldn't it? Well, that's what Paul is saying about the church in Corinth. So, what's the problem in Corinth that means that it would be better for them not to meet at all?

Well, you'll see on the outline, on the back of the, there's my watch, the outline on the back of the service sheet, that we're going to start with the problem, and then after that, we're going to think about both the solution and the outcome.

And my aim, really, is that by the end of this passage, having looked at the passage together, what we're going to see is, we're going to see a wonderfully attractive picture of what the local church can be and should be, in terms of the way in which we relate to each other.

So, first of all, the problem, a despised church. And the repeated phrase, in verses 17 to 22, is come together. It's there in verse 17, it's there in verse 18, and it's there in verse 20.

And what is it that their coming together should reflect? Well, it should reflect the glorious truth that the letter started with. So, turn back to chapter 1, verse 2, which I think is, in many ways, the key verse of the whole letter.

[8:45] This is the glorious truth that the letter starts with. Chapter 1, verse 2, to the church of God that is in Corinth. Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints.

The truth, you see, that they are the church of God. They are set apart to belong to Jesus Christ and to be distinct from the world and to serve him.

But, of course, if you've been following our series in 1 Corinthians over the last few months, then what we've noticed time and time again is that actually the church in Corinth, sadly, is a worldly church, which has really bought in to the values of the world and no more so than when they meet together.

They come to church, in other words, not to serve one another, but to serve themselves. Verse 18. For, in the first place, when you come together as church, I hear there are divisions among you, and

I believe it in part, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized.

When you come together, it's not the Lord's Supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. What? Do you not have houses to eat and drink in?

[10:05] 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.

When they share the Lord's Supper in the context of a meal, they are divided between rich and poor, the haves and the have-nots. In other words, their life together as a church simply reflects that the social pecking order of life outside the church, of life in their culture.

It may even be that in verse 19, Paul hints at the way they justified what was happening in terms of the elite needing to stand out to make the church look more impressive.

Look at all these important people we have in our church. Isn't ours a powerful, impressive kind of church, the church you'd like to join? Perhaps the email to Paul had read something like this.

Hi, Paul. When the church gathers at so-and-so's house for the Lord's Supper, they have their best friends, the other wealthier families of the church, with them in the dining room where all the food is served and some are even getting drunk as you would do at a party.

[11:15] The rest of us are left in the courtyard sitting on benches and hardly get anything to eat and drink at all. It is all too apparent from where and what each one was served how we rank in terms of social status.

Now, there's nothing wrong with being a rich Christian. But there's a lot wrong with the attitude that that can so easily lead to and the way others end up being treated.

And clearly, this principle doesn't just apply, does it, to the Lord's Supper? It's about how the church generally functions. In other words, we mustn't bring the distinctives that exist outside of the church into the church.

Differences of education, wealth, background, employment, culture. Such things matter a great deal out in the world.

They are the markers, aren't they, by which we rank each other, one over the other, and so on.

They have a great deal of significance and they matter a lot.

[12:24] But none of those things should matter in the local congregation in the church. Now, of course, we may well think we'd never behave in the kind of outrageous way the church in Corinth is behaving.

But just think again. Do you come to church to serve yourself or to serve others? To serve yourself, in other words, to catch up with your friends, to invite into your home those whose company you value, to enjoy conversation with those who are like you, clever, accomplished, articulate, witty, and so on, and avoiding all those who are unlike that, who are at the other end of the spectrum, so to speak, or to serve others.

To look out for those who are on the edge. To get alongside the person who may be very unlike us in all sorts of ways. Or just think of the new person, the newcomer.

You see, one kind of newcomer who is similar to us may be warmly welcomed and embraced. But another kind of newcomer who is very different, well, they may be left on the sidelines.

Someone recently observed that the time people arrive at church says a great deal about whether they come to serve themselves or to serve others. There are those who arrive early to help with the last minute setup, to welcome newcomers to talk to others, and so on.

[14:00] And there are those who arrive at the last minute or later with the expectation that everything will be ready for them. Or just think of jam on a Sunday evening or growth group midweek.

For all of us, there are times, aren't there, where frankly, we'd rather not go. We've had an exhausting day. We've got a lot on or whatever it is. We're tired. We're busy. Well, of course, if I go to church to serve myself, then at that point, I won't go.

If I go to church to serve others, then I will go. The problem, a despised church. Secondly, the solution, a broken saviour.

Have a look at verses 23 to 26. 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.

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, also, he took the cup after supper, saying, this cup is the new covenant in my blood.

[15:10] Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Well, they're familiar words. We say them every time we remember the Lord's supper and take bread and wine together. But the question is, of course, why are they here in 1 Corinthians 11? What have they got to do with the issue which we've seen in this chapter already? Well, very simply, they are here because the whole of the Christian life is cross-shaped.

Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, Mark chapter 8, verse 34, I put them there on the outline. If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

In other words, to be a Christian is not simply to believe in a crucified savior, but to be a Christian is to follow a crucified savior.

[16:13] The cross, you see, is not simply how you begin the Christian life as we put our trust in the Lord Jesus who died for our sins so we can be forgiven. It is actually then what then shapes the whole of the Christian life as we live and as we follow a savior who was crucified.

The whole of the Christian life is to be shaped by the cross. It's actually what we've seen throughout the letter, yet which time and time again the Christians in Corinth so resist and so despised.

Just turn back to chapter 1, verse 18. Chapter 1, verse 18, where we see it's the weak, foolish message of the cross that is the gospel the church should be proclaiming for the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

Whereas the Corinthians, you see, they want an impressive gospel, they want an impressive message which makes them look good in their surrounding society. Or flick over a page of chapter 4, verse 9 where we see that genuine Christian leaders will look weak and foolish.

Chapter 4, verse 9, for I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all like men sentenced to death because we've become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men.

[17:45] Whereas, of course, the Corinthians want leaders who look impressive because if you have impressive church leaders then you feel good about the church you're going to, serving themselves. In chapter 5, verse 7, in response to sexual immorality, Paul doesn't say as you might to a two-year-old that is naughty, stop it.

No, he reminds them of the cross. Chapter 5, verse 7, cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump as you really are unleavened for Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed.

In other words, you Corinthians don't be shaped by the world around you but instead be shaped by the cross, by who you now are in Christ. or over another page or two, chapter 8, verse 11, where the better taught Christians are trampling over the consciences of the weak.

Paul says, 8, 11, and so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. In other words, you see, in every single section of the book, whether it's talking about the nature of the gospel, the nature of Christian leadership, sex and marriage, our rights and freedoms, giving them up for the gospel, or the way in which we relate to each other as God's people.

In every single section of the book, Paul says, your thinking and your living needs to be shaped by the cross. And that is why chapter 11, verses 23 to 26 are here.

[19:18] And it is very visual, isn't it? Verse 24, this is my body which is for you. do this in remembrance of me. Having given thanks, he breaks the bread, broken bread, broken body, the night of his betrayal and arrest, just hours before he is mocked and crucified.

He takes the bread and breaks it. This is my body, his broken body, the broken bread. And he goes on which is for you. That word for means on behalf of, instead of, the Lord Jesus dying as a substitute in our place.

So how might the Corinthians, you see, be feeling as this part of the letter is read out to them in their Sunday service? In this me first church, in this I expect others to serve me church, in this I'm not bothered about you down there church.

or a broken saviour, a dying on behalf of others, serving others saviour. And then verse 25, 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. The cup signifies God's wrath, his judgment on sin. The blood speaks of a violent death.

[20:50] The new covenant fulfills the promise of Jeremiah 31 that we had in our first reading of a new people of God's family, those who will be brothers and sisters and belong to the risen Lord and saviour.

This is how Jesus explained the significance of his death. A broken servant saviour, serving others, not serving himself.

I wonder if you've come across this book that has been published to celebrate the queen's 90th birthday. It's called The Servant Queen, which those with very good eyesight can probably read, but then underneath, which I shouldn't think anyone can read, and the king she serves.

the servant queen and the king she serves. It's a great little book. It's about her faith in the Lord Jesus and how it has shaped her reign.

I discovered lots of fascinating things in it. At her coronation, she is given an orb to hold with more than 600 jewels set into it, yet on top of the orb is a cross to demonstrate the fact that although she is queen, actually she is to serve the Lord Jesus, who is the one who rules over the whole earth, and that she is to serve a far greater one than she is.

[22:26] And then what I also didn't realize was that part of her coronation was not televised, but the so-called secret ceremony, when all the symbols of her royal status were removed, so the crimson velvet robe was taken off, the diamond diadem was taken off, the coronation necklace was taken off, and then wearing a simple white dress, far simpler, I gather, than you would wear at a wedding, wearing a simple white dress, she was anointed with oil, again to make the point that she was being set apart to serve.

Just as at her Christmas address in 2012, she said, this is the time of year when we remember that God sent his only son to serve, not to be served.

A broken savior. Which means, of course, that subgroups and cliques bringing the distinctives and markers which are so important into the world, bringing all those things into church.

Why? It's totally incompatible, isn't it, with the savior who came not to serve himself but to serve others. And incompatible as well with the new covenant community that we are because the Lord Jesus came to earth to call to himself the people from every tribe and every nation, from all different backgrounds to form one united church.

What God has joined together, we dare not divide. It's no wonder, is it, that Paul was so horrified that the distinctions in the world still remained in the church in Corinth.

[24:11] The problem, a despised church, the solution, a broken savior, the outcome, a serving others church. And this is where Paul moves on to apply the principle of verses 23 to 26 to life in the church in Corinth and to us today.

Have a look at verse 27. 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. Let a person examine himself then and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup for anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.

Now it seems to me there are a number of questions that we need to answer. First of all, verse 27. What does it mean to take the bread and the wine in an unworthy manner? Well, notice Paul is not saying that we can't approach the Lord's table unless our hearts are completely pure.

I think that's how we naturally read verse 27. You know, as if we have to sort of make ourselves worthy in some way as we take the Lord's supper by looking solemn and sanctimonious and so on. But actually, of course, none of us can take the Lord's supper, can we? The bread and the wine. We're not confident in our own righteousness. All are sinners and all fall far short of the glory of God.

[25:34] No, think of the context here in 1 Corinthians 11. What is going on here in 1 Corinthians 11? Taking the bread and the wine in an unworthy manner is to do what the Corinthians are doing.

It is all about our relationships with one another. Second, verse 28, what's it mean to examine yourself? And verse 29, what's it mean to discern the body?

Well, again, verses which are so easily and frequently misunderstood. Misunderstood to encourage a sort of an inward introspection as we take the bread and the wine.

A sort of highly individualistic view of the Lord's supper, which is all about me taking my communion as one individual. But actually, that is completely the opposite of what Paul intends here.

Instead, we are to examine ourselves in our attitude towards others within the church family. We are to discern the body, as Paul says, meaning not Jesus' physical body, but Christ's body, which is the church.

[26:42] All of us. Notice then what is happening at the Lord's supper, or Holy Communion, as some call it. Notice where we should be looking.

Okay? Verses 23 to 25, we should be looking back to the cross as we remember the death of the Lord Jesus on our behalf. Verse 26, we should be looking forward to the future, to the return of the Lord Jesus at the end of time.

But, verses 27 to 29, we are also to look around at one another, recognizing Jesus' church, his body.

And, of course, as we do so, we bear witness to the new creation where people from every nation and every tribe will be gathered around the throne in heaven. In his book about Christian work in universities around the world, Lindsay Brown describes a wonderful example of this in practice in Burundi at a time of great tension between Hutu and Tutsi.

A number of Hutus were killed in tribal fighting universities, which caused many others to flee to the mountains. And soon afterwards, a number of Tutsi students went to find them, Tutsi Christian students, I should say, went to find them and took them food and clothing.

[28:03] As a result, some of those were rejected by their own families Christians. They put allegiance to the Lord Jesus above allegiance to their family and to their tribe. But the non-Christian principal of the university said this afterwards, our culture is disintegrating.

On our campus, there are now three types of people, Hutus, Tutsis, and Christians. If our culture is to survive, we must follow the example of Christians.

the power you see of the cross to shape and transform broken relationships. Well, and then verses 30 to 32, where Paul adds a warning, lest we imagine, which I guess is the temptation perhaps for us, that actually the way we relate to each other as God's people perhaps isn't quite so serious after all.

Verse 30, that is why many of you are weak and ill and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

Now, we need to be careful how we read these verses. This is the Apostle Paul speaking with all the authority of divine revelation, something no one can do today, because there are no apostles today. They all died out with that first generation of eyewitnesses of Jesus' resurrection.

[29:30] So we mustn't assume that every illness is the result of sin. Indeed, Jesus specifically says that is not the case in Luke chapter 13 and in John chapter 9.

But it is equally mistaken to think that God never uses an illness or death or suffering as a means of discipline. When I was ill with glandular fever several years ago, and I was off work for a period of time, I was very glad when someone said to me, might this be God's disciplining of you?

It hadn't been something I thought about, and I was glad to have the opportunity to do so. The danger you see is that we have such a sort of tame view of God that actually we assume that God could never work in a way such as this.

So then how will you prepare yourself for the Lord's Supper next on the 3rd of July in two weeks' time? Well, I guess some of us perhaps prepare for church just with a quick look in the mirror to make sure we look respectable.

Perhaps others prepare normally a little bit more thoroughly. Perhaps we pray beforehand. Perhaps we even read the Bible passage beforehand. Very commendable. Very good thing to do. But how about examining ourselves in regard to each other?

[30:53] How about doing that? Is there someone you need to apologize to? Is there someone you have hurt? Someone you have ignored?

The Lord's Supper is the opportunity to examine ourselves, to see if we have treated one another in a way that is consistent with following a Savior who is broken to serve others.

So from September, you'll notice that when the new term cards arrive for September, you'll notice that the Sundays where we are going to be celebrating the Lord's Supper are going to be clearly marked on the term card. So we have notice, if you like, so we can get our relationships with each other sorted out before we take bread and wine together.

But of course, it's not just the Lord's Supper, is it? Perhaps here are some other questions which we would do well to ask. Do we demonstrate a radical other person approach, a radical other person centred love in our relationships as a church family generally?

Do we just build relationships and friendships with those who are like us, with those who are from similar backgrounds, or with those who are naturally, you know, the ones we sort of click with most easily? Or do we also befriend those who are unlike us?

[32:09] Perhaps those who make us feel uncomfortable. Perhaps those who are draining in some way. are we willing to sacrifice our own preferences in terms of what we think church should be like for the sake of those who are different to us and have different preferences?

Do we use church well? Arriving early to serve, staying for coffee, making the most of our coffee time. People come to church, don't they, with all sorts of different needs and feelings, and feelings, perhaps feelings of loneliness or feeling needy or despondent.

I can come to church feeling like that. I think we all can, can't we? We mustn't assume that everyone's lives are sorted. We know they're not sorted. We know none of us are sorted. It's why we all need to be willing to cross the floor, to care for each other, to do so with those who are not like us.

Now I take that kind of serving others' love, I take it will be costly, but I take it will also build a deeper, richer church family, which will also be a powerful witness to those around us.

Let's have a few moments of quiet, and then I shall lead us in prayer. prayer. And when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, this is my body, which is for you.

[33:43] Do this in remembrance of me. Heavenly Father, we praise you for the broken body of the Lord Jesus, given for us in our place.

We praise you for the blood of the Lord Jesus as he died, taking in himself the judgment of God that we deserve. And we pray, Heavenly Father, that our life together as a local church would indeed be shaped by the cross.

We confess when so often we are self-centered, when we want to be served by others. And we pray that instead we would be keen to serve others in this sacrificial, breaking, or being broken for ourselves way as we seek to serve and build up others.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.