

Discern the body...and so wait for one another

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[0:00] To sit under the preaching of your word. I pray that you open my mouth to proclaim that word in the power of the Spirit. And that the same Spirit would open the ears and hearts of all here assembled! To receive your holy gospel and write it on their hearts, your holy law.

Even as you have promised. All this we ask in the name of your Son, our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen. Please be seated.

We're continuing in chapter 11 of 1 Corinthians. It's on page 1139 of your pew Bible.

So I invite you to open along. And as we continue in 1 Corinthians, we continue to look, actually in this part of the letter, we continue to look at God's design for his church.

We're looking over Apostle Paul's shoulders, as it were, as he writes to the church in Corinth. So that we ourselves also may understand who we are as the church, the body of Christ.

[1:21] So the verses in view this morning raise a troubling question. Can the way we act in worship defeat the purpose of getting together in the first place?

In other words, can our Bible studies, our prayer meetings, or even the Holy Eucharist service, deviate so much from the way God intended it to be, that it no longer counts as an act of worship? The Corinthians' behavior around the Lord's Supper proves that it is possible for that to be the case. That it is possible to defeat the purpose for which Christ intends for his church to function when they assemble.

And Paul was quite blunt with them in his assessment of them in verse 17. He says, 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.

Paul is saying to them that you've so undermined the purpose of gathering, that you're doing more harm than you are good. And that's a damning verdict to give from the apostle, to give to them.

[2:40] And it must have pained Paul to even write such a thing to a church that he himself planted. To say to them, you should stay at home.

It would be better for you to stay at home, rather than continue to hold your church meetings. And we must think, what would cause apostle Paul to say such a thing to these believers in the Corinthian church?

Well, it's because they're operating and acting out behaviors that harm the church and harm one another.

They're abusing the Lord's Supper. And Paul continues in verse 18, he says, For in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you.

Now, the causes of these divisions come from issues having to do with disparity in wealth within the church in Corinth. It has to do with the use of the place of worship.

[3:44] And it also has to do with social status among the members of the Corinthian church. As you know, you might not know this, but the New Testament church gathered in houses.

They didn't have church buildings like we do today. And in Corinth, the church would have gathered in homes, and especially homes that are large enough to accommodate a sizable crowd.

And so it would have been a home of one of the wealthier members of the church. Additionally, you would have noticed that their observance of the Lord's Supper is different from ours, as we read this part of 1 Corinthians.

It's because the early church had love feasts. And it's really, all it is, it's an ordinary meal. When they gather together, it's more like our potlucks. They bring food together, they gather together, they bring food, and they eat together.

And at the end of their meal, this ordinary meal, at the end of it, they celebrated the Lord's Supper. It's not unlike what actually happened when Christ himself instituted the Lord's Supper.

[5:00] It was at the end of a Passover feast, meal together. Granted, that was also a sacramental feast in the Old Testament. But it was the end of that, then he then instituted the Lord's Supper.

So this is what's the pattern of the New Testament church, and probably in Corinth as well. But it is in the midst of these, it is this love feast itself that was the major cause of abuse.

And it is the love, the behavior at the love feast that invalidates the observance of the Lord's Supper. And this is what Paul writes to them in verse 20.

When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper that you eat. Why? Verse 21, for in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal.

One goes hungry, another gets drunk. So what's going on here is that the wealthy, the avns among them, they likely gathered first.

[6:03] And the poor, the avnots, who were likely laborers or slaves even, working all day, came to the gathering late.

They could not come early, so they came late. And they likely also had little food to share, like their wealthy brothers in Christ. So they come with little to share, and they come late.

And you might expect that at least they will come expecting that these love feasts will be sharing in the generosity of their brothers and sisters in Christ, who are well off.

And that's what they will probably expect as they come. But that's not what happens. What happens is that they arrive at the gathering to see that the haves have started without them.

With no intention at all of sharing of their abundance with their other brothers and sisters in Christ, who are coming, they've eaten all the food. In fact, you have a picture of that they've just greedily eaten everything.

[7:17] They've eaten all the food, they've drunk all the wine, even unto drunkenness. And here's a picture of excess. Whereas, the avnots arrive.

They arrive hungry. And they leave hungry. It's a picture of deprivation and lack. While in the same body, there were some who were given over to drunkenness and excess.

And yet, they claimed to be one body in Christ. What a travesty. You can imagine the resentment, anger, bitterness that such a condition would brew in that church.

That's the division that Paul refers to in verse 18. Paul forcefully reprimands them and their conduct. So much so that he leads him to say in verse 22.

What? It's almost like an incredulous statement. What? Do you not have houses to eat in and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?

[8:29] What shall I say to you? Paul says to them. Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not. What a strange church meeting. I'm happy to say I've never been in such a church meeting.

I don't know about you guys. But I think that I take that as a positive. What a strange church meeting that we have here. The way the Corinthian church has ordered the Lord's Supper invalidates the meal as God designed it.

And I think the Corinthian abuse actually, the Corinthian abuse of this sacrament went a long way in discouraging the practice of the love feast in the church in later generations.

After all, Jesus never commanded us to observe a loved feast anyway. What he commands us to is to observe the sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

That's what we're commanded to keep. And so Paul now goes in verse 23 to 26 to the heart of the matter. He's showing them how they are opposing the work of Jesus and living contrary to the gospel in their behaviors.

[9:49] And he kind of explains to them in these middle verses what the Lord's Supper actually is. And how far away from it they are. Now, this meal is not an ordinary meal.

That is the Lord's Supper. Or the Holy Communion. Or the Holy Eucharist. Whatever word you use for it. It all means the same thing that we have here in these passages in 1 Corinthians.

And Paul refers to the historical context of the meal in verse 23. It says, This is a reference to the last Passover meal that Jesus had with his twelve apostles before his crucifixion.

That's what Paul is referencing in verse 23. And it's this tradition, this institution of the Lord's Supper, this tradition was handed down by the Lord himself to his first apostles.

And Paul received it and delivered it to the churches he planted as an article of faith. It is an apostolic tradition that is given to the church and must be observed.

[11:07] So, for example, if you go to a church and they don't observe the Lord's Supper. Some churches don't do it as we do every Sunday, every weekly as we do.

But if you've gone to that church six months and they haven't observed it, it should at least be monthly. But if they don't observe it, that church is operating in disobedience to God's command. Maybe you should go to the pastor and ask him why such is the case. But here is Paul instituting what he has received. He handed it over, handed it on to the church in which he planted. And the words, For on the night that he was betrayed, our Lord Jesus Christ took bread. Those words anchored the church's observance of the Lord's Supper to an event in history. So, this thing that we observe every Sunday, we're to look back to that event in history. Not just the night, but what is about to take place, which is the death of Jesus Christ. [12 : 16] And in this way, the Lord's Supper is actually a new Passover feast. A new Passover meal for the covenant people of God.

As the old Passover meal was for the Old Testament saints. And so Paul continues in verse 24. So, here we're confronted with two questions from these verses.

What is the meal about? And who is the meal for? What is the meal about? We're to keep in mind that this was on the night he was betrayed.

The Greek word there is, Ended over. Ended over to death. On that night, Jesus Christ broke bread and gave it to them and said, This is my body, which is for you.

So the meal is about his death. That is what the meal is about. It is about the death of Jesus Christ. The bread signifies his body, which is broken for us. And who is the meal for?

[13 : 37] It is for us. We partake of the bread and wine. Notice that it is for those who are in Christ. We have an account in our gospel reading this morning of Jesus turning five loaves and two fishes into enough food to feed 5,000 men.

Not counting the women and children. But that is not such. The Lord's Supper feast meal is not for the masses. It is for those who are in Christ.

It is a family meal. It is for those who know Jesus as Savior. We have come to him in covenant. Covenanted with him.

And article 28 of our Anglican Confessional Standard states this. It says, The supper of the Lord is not only a sign of the love that Christians ought to have among themselves, one to another.

But rather, it is a sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death. In so much that such as rightly, worthily, and with faith, receive the same.

[14 : 45] That is the sacrament. The bread which we break is a partaking of the body of Christ. And likewise, the cup of blessing is a partaking of the blood of Christ. As I read that, I hope you're reminded of 1 Corinthians 10, verse 16 and 17 that we just went through.

Two weeks or three weeks ago. And I'm not going to go and explain this article, explain this article here. For that, you will have to come to our Christian Education Hour as we go through the 39 articles.

I do invite you to join us then. We'll talk more about this article then when we get to it. But I do want to point out some key things in that article.

The first is that this meal is a sign of the love that Christians ought to have among themselves, one to another. Do you see that in this account of the first Corinthian reading that we read?

No. The Corinthian model fails to meet that preliminary standard. And then second, and more importantly, this meal is a sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death.

[15 : 55] And what I want us to focus on is that this meal is a sacrament of our redemption by Christ's death. As you remember, the old Passover meal we mentioned earlier was a reenactment of God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt.

We have an account of that in Exodus. The Jews, in keeping that observant feast, every generation after that event of the Exodus, every other observations in subsequent generations, when the Jews keep this feast, what they're actually doing in the observance is that they're reenacting the night of salvation and judgment.

When the angel of death passed through Egypt and slayed the firstborn sons of the Egyptians, while sparing the sons in every home in which the blood of the lamb was sprinkled on the doorpost. And so the point of observing the meal for the Jews in the Old Testament is that, as you observe it in remembrance, the remembrance is not just a mental recall. Not the same way you remember your anniversary or you remember a particular date.

That's not what we have in mind here. It's not merely a mental recall. But in the remembering, what we're meant to do and what the Jews did in the observance of the Passover, is that they placed

themselves in that redemptive event in Egypt.

[17 : 27] Every subsequent generation of the Israelite nation, as they observed the Passover feast, it's like they are placing themselves in the homes of the Hebrew slaves on the night the angel of death was about to pass by.

And as they eat, they recount the deliverance of God in saving them from slavery in Egypt. And not only just the saving them from slavery in Egypt, but the ongoing subsequent nourishment in the wilderness with manna and water from the rock.

That's all they are meant to have in view as they observe this feast. And so in an even greater way, the new Passover, the Lord's Supper, is to be observed in the same way.

As we come to the table to receive the bread and wine, we are in communion in the body and blood of Christ, which was delivered up in death for us.

So the redemptive event of the cross, where Christ died for our sins, the atoning sacrifice of our Lord, is what we are called to reflect on as we observe this feast.

[18 : 43] The Supper. Remember, this is a sacrificial meal, in that you are called, you and I are called, to remember the once for all, full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice of Christ, which satisfied the wrath of God for your sins.

To remember the redemptive event of our deliverance from the greatest slavery of sin and death at the cross, to the atoning sacrifice of Christ.

And then Paul goes on in verse 3 and says, as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, what do you do? You proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

Proclaim. That word in Greek also means to announce or to preach. So you don't speak when you come to receive the bread and wine.

None of you, you don't speak. You come, you receive it, and then you receive, you take the cup, and you go. You don't speak. So what does it mean then to say you proclaim?

[19 : 47] Well, you indeed, although you don't speak, you are saying a lot in the coming and receiving or partaking. You are proclaiming the gospel story in dramatic form, as it were.

In the supper, Christ is the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. And He is also the substance of the new covenant, the Paschal Lamb, who takes away the sin of the world, who has fulfilled all that the old, all that the sacrifices of the Old Testament point to.

And so as you come and partake of this communion, you are partaking of this body and blood in a real sense. In a real sense.

In that you are sharing in the benefits Christ has brought to you through His sacrificial death.

Hence, we come to the table with joyful and grateful hearts.

Because we have been made worthy through the merits of Christ, our mediator. Therein lies the gospel proclamation of the Lord's death.

[20 : 58] And we proclaim it to one another as we participate at the Lord's table. So you, who are guilty, have been made worthy.

You've been placed in right relationship with God through Christ. That's the reason we call it the Lord's table. It's not Church of the Holy Trinity's table.

It's not Pastor Iff's table. It's not Jack Mumford's table. It's the Lord's table. And He doesn't, He's not like the rich Corinthians who just own a mere house.

He has a kingdom of righteousness and peace that He's invited us to enter into. You, all of us, are the have-nots.

We're the poor. We are unable to approach because we have been soiled in garments of sin. We are not worthy to approach this table.

[22 : 02] Yet, He who is rich in mercies, He who alone has earned the righteousness that justifies, freely gives Himself to you at His table and invites you to come.

That's what the Corinthians don't see. They don't see that we're all beggars. And Eve, from His abundant riches, clothes us in His righteousness so we may commune with Him, our risen Lord, through the Spirit.

And here Paul says at the end of verse 26, says, we proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. All of this that we do is done in anticipation of the great marriage supper of the Lamb that we have in Revelation 19.

The Lord's Supper is a drama that we play out every time we gather. It's a drama of the whole Christian life, in fact. We proclaim it every time we come to the table.

I'm reminded of this wonderful contemporary hymn, We Will Feast in the House of Zion. The verses go like this. It says, Every vow we've broken and betrayed, you are the faithful one.

[23 : 20] We have broken every vow. We've betrayed. But He is the faithful one. And from the garden, that is the Garden of Eden, to the grave, bind us together, bring shalom.

Those are the wonderful words. And then the chorus goes like this. As we come, joyfully, we proclaim together. We will feast. We're looking forward, even at this Lord's Supper, to that great feast.

We will feast in the house of Zion. We will sing with our hearts restored. He has done great things. We will say together, we will feast and weep no more.

I hope we can sing that in the coming Sundays, music team. But that's the picture we're meant to have. As we come, we remember the death, the sacrificial atoning death, and we look forward to the consummation as we come.

We look forward to that time when we will feast with Him. And so, this is why what the Corinthians are doing is so tragic.

[24 : 32] Such a travesty their conduct. And so, Paul, in verse 27 to 32, having explained the significance of the meal, he now shows the Corinthians how far they're falling from what God intended the meal to signify.

He says in 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 the blood of the Lord. So let a person examine himself.

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 healed 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. It's covenantal language Paul is giving to them.

[25 : 40] Examine yourself before you come. You don't want to partake of the bread and drink the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner.

And such was the unhealthy condition of the Corinthian church that Paul says to them, many of you have even fallen ill and some of you have died. Now, as we read that, I want to caution us.

We must be careful here to read this as the verdict of God the Holy Spirit through his inspiration of Paul the Apostle. And the appeal, notice, is to self-diagnosis.

Self-diagnosis. So, any attempt to read your brother's sickness or the cold that he has or the coughing fit that he has as God's punishment for him having fallen short of the mark is way off.

We're not meant to police each other here at the Lord's table. In fact, we'll talk about it. Even now, we're meant to examine ourselves. By the way, I don't know if you noticed that that's why we offer peace to one another after hearing God's assurance every Sunday.

[26 : 54] When we hear God's assurance of peace to us after the confession of sins, after we hear the comfortable words, then we extend peace to one another. It's not just a time to catch up in the middle of the service.

It is a time to say to your brother and sister in Christ, especially the one whom you harbor anything against, to go to them and extend the end of peace, to reconcile, to have peace between you before you come to the table of the Lord.

That's part of the examination that we're meant to have. Oftentimes, this cannot be done in one minute, the one minute that we have. So, what the practical thing to do is to go.

if there is actually a brother that you have something against, to go to them. Make peace and commit to reconciling after the service, after we come to the table.

Extend the hand of peace, both come to the table as sinners saved by God's amazing grace. And there's more to say here in these verses, but for the sake of time, I want to limit it to the crucial point.

[28 : 02] The examination that Paul calls us to make has often been misinterpreted in the church. Oftentimes, what happens for believers is that we end up navel-gazing when it comes to this examination.

Now, we end up living in doubt and fear and trepidation before we come to the Lord's table. Wrongly thinking that we need to make ourselves worthy before we approach the table.

It's such an erroneous thinking that we need to make ourselves worthy. And so, what happens, and I, when I grew up in the church, and this was a point of great inner turmoil for me until the Lord delivered me of it, where I'm always constantly wondering, well, I know what I did this week, and I try to recount everything, and am I worthy to come to the table?

Am I going to be struck as I approach the Lord's table? But, whereas the truth is, what's the truth? We are not worthy. There's no point trying to examine whether we're worthy to approach the table in and of ourselves, mind you. We're not worthy in and of ourselves to approach the table.

[29 : 24] Consider the prayer of humble access that we say before we come. We do not presume to come to this, your table, O merciful Lord, resting in our own righteousness, but in your abundant and great mercies.

You cannot come on your own merits, and that's part of the problem with the Corinthians. They think they could, and if you think you have a righteousness of your own, then you might want to heed the warning of St. Paul's, because to rest on your own merits when you approach the table is actually to come in an unworthy manner.

Likewise, to be so greedy and prideful of heart, to focus on status in the church of Christ, or to mistreat and be indifferent to the plight of your fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, in God's family, is also to come in an unworthy manner.

So for the same reason, because you're living as if, for the same reason, because you are living as if you are not a beggar like them when you come to the table, as if you are not in need of grace like they do.

So when you're puffed up like the Corinthians were in their own righteousness, in their own egos, and in their own selfishness, they've made the Lord suffer and they've invalidated it and they've come in an unworthy way.

[30 : 56] And so it's vital for us to understand this. The warning here that Paul gives us is to discern the body. And then he goes in verse 29 to verse 33 to 34.

So then, my brothers, discern the body so then when you come together to eat, wait for one another. The way you can think of that is welcome one another.

Wait for one another. Wait for those who are coming late. Welcome them. Be welcoming to them. 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. And so there might be other things that Paul has in mind but this is the main thing he wants to deal with them, write to them about.

Here's the invitation of the Apostle Paul to us as well. Discern the body. The body here is in reference, the body in reference here is the body of Christ, the church.

[32 : 02] That's what we're meant to discern. Here are some searching questions that we might want to ask ourselves to help us discern. What are we proclaiming to one another when we gather as the church of Christ?

Not only at the Lord's Supper but even as we gather for Bible study, as we interact together as the people of God, as we do life together. What are we proclaiming to one another and to the world out there as we gather as the people of God?

Are we immature? Are we self-focused? Are we status-obsessed like the Corinthians? Are we so self-focused that we are unable to see the suffering or lack of others around us?

Or worse, like the Corinthians, were indifferent to their suffering and lack. And while we don't have love-peace like the Corinthian church does, we do have potlucks though, and I'm grateful for that, but while we don't have the kind of love-peace that they do, and the context in which we participate at the Lord's table is different from theirs, we can still arbor the same mindset in our life together. And here's where we must discern, examine ourselves. It's a communal examination and an individual one as well. Discern the body and all that we will proclaim the gospel in the way we relate to one another.

[33 : 38] May our proclamation for the Trinity as we participate in communion with God and with one another at the Lord's table, may it be, as one theologian puts it, as we come silently but yet saying a lot, may what we say in our hearts and in our actions to one another be, Christ has died for me.

I am His and He is mine. in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.
Amen.