

Honouring the Body of Christ

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 23 September 2018

Preacher: Andrew Price

[0 : 00] It would be great if you could turn in your Bibles again to 1 Corinthians chapter 11 as we continue our series through Paul's letter to the Corinthian church. There's also an outline that you might find helpful in your bulletins too.

Well, I wonder if you've ever been on your way to a dinner party of some sort, but arrived late only to find all the food gone.

Has that ever happened to you? No? What am I doing wrong? I arrived late home two weeks ago, I think it was, and I was just 10 minutes late for dinner, and the jolly kids had eaten all the food.

The stir-fry pan was empty, and I felt rather neglected that I wasn't part of the family. And so I went down the road to KFC, which I shouldn't have done, and then I came back and ate it in front of them, which I shouldn't have done either.

But the point is, food does more than fill you. Food also has this funny way of fostering relationships or fostering fellowship amongst you.

[1 : 18] And so that when we eat together with friends or family, it often expresses our unity with them and enables us to strengthen our relationships with them.

It's why we often wait until everyone is seated at the table before we start eating, so that we can do it together. It expresses our unity together. But if you turn up late to dinner like I did and there's nothing left, then you often feel left out.

You feel on the outer, divided, not united. And even if you do turn up late and there is some food left, if you've ever done that at a party, then you still feel on the outer because while you're eating food, everyone else is off talking and doing something else.

They've moved on. You're doing it by yourself. The point is, food can foster fellowship when done together, but it can also create divisions when people are left out.

And the Corinthian church was leaving people out. What's more, their church meals were meant to include the Lord's Supper. They were meant to have a fellowship meal and then the Lord's Supper, where they remembered together Christ's death for them all, which united them together.

[2 : 37] But instead of remembering that and eating together, they were leaving people out. And their meals, therefore, were creating divisions and actually denying the unity that Christ's death had bought them.

And in so doing, they despise the church of God in which he put them. So we're at point one in your outlines and verse 17 in your Bibles.

Paul begins by saying, In the following directives, I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good, he says. Now, you might remember back in verse 2 last week, he actually praised them for remembering him and the traditions just as he passed down to them.

And I suggested that included men and women praying and prophesying in church. But when it came to the instruction or the tradition about the Lord's Supper, he has no praise for them.

In fact, he says their meetings to celebrate the Lord's Supper actually did more harm than good. In other words, they're not worth doing. It's not worth meeting together as a church.

[3 : 50] Now, can you imagine telling a church, Don't meet together anymore. It's worse when you do. It must be pretty serious, mustn't it? So what's going on? Well, verse 18, he says, 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. And no doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval. Now, in verse 18, he says, In the first place, which suggests there is a second place and a third place, like there's a few problems.

And he'll deal with those problems when he arrives. That's what he talks about in verse 34 at the end of the chapter. But this first problem of divisions needs attention now.

For although they come together, verse 18, they are not acting like they belong together. Instead, there are divisions. And now these divisions are not the sort of divisions we saw earlier this year in chapter 1.

You might remember in chapter 1, they were trying to outdo each other in a game of spiritual one-upmanship. They were dividing over who the best leader was and saying, Well, I'm better because I follow Paul.

[5 : 01] No, I'm better because I follow Apollos and so on. And I said, it was like the time I was joking with a friend of mine in an old church because the minister who married Michelle and me had just become the bishop.

And so I said, oh, well, the bishop married me. The only problem was the minister who married him had just become the archbishop. And so he said, well, the archbishop married me. And on it goes. Those are the sorts of divisions that are happening in chapter 1.

But chapter 11 is different divisions. This time between the rich and the poor, between those who have and those who have not. And given the Corinthians were so prone to divisions in order to make themselves spiritually superior, Paul says in verse 18, he has no trouble believing it.

Yeah, of course, the divisions again. In fact, in verse 19, he gets rather sarcastic, I think. And he says, no doubt there have to be divisions amongst you to show which one is more spiritual, which one has God's approval.

But, says Paul, such divisions actually mean the meal you're celebrating has stopped becoming the Lord's Supper.

[6 : 05] You see verse 20? So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat. Why? Well, for when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers.

And as a result, one person remains hungry and then another gets drunk. You see, the Corinthian church would usually meet in a number of smaller homes.

But sometimes they would come together as a whole church in a bigger home, usually the home of a wealthy person. They're the ones that had big homes on a Sunday. And we don't know how often they did this.

But we do know that the Lord's Supper occurred on this sort of occasion when the whole church was gathered. And it seems that the Lord's Supper was part of a bigger meal, where they'd eat a fellowship meal and then also celebrate the Lord's Supper as an extra kind of special meal.

Now, remember, Sunday was not a day off. The poor still had to work and did not have much to bring, if anything, to this meal. The rich, on the other hand, brought lots of food and drink to this meal.

[7 : 13] And they didn't have to work. So they would start eating and drinking early and even getting drunk. So that by the time the poor finished work and got there, there was no food left.

You know, the stir fry pan was empty. Except for maybe some wine for the Lord's Supper bit at the very end of the meal. But Paul says, it's no longer the Lord's Supper you're celebrating.

For you cannot celebrate the death of our Saviour on the one hand, and then humiliate and despise his people on the other. It doesn't work like that. And that's exactly what the rich have done by excluding the poor.

Do you see verse 22? He says, You see, by not eating together, the rich left the poor out, which humiliated them, reminded them they had nothing.

And this in turn despised God's church, which was supposed to be united. There may have been social divisions between the rich and the poor outside the church.

[8 : 30] But they weren't supposed to reinforce those divisions inside the church. It would be like us having our Lord's Supper, which we're having today, but creating two time slots.

One for the rich and one for the poor. And so the rich amongst you, you can have the Lord's Supper as part of our service. And I'll have Baker's Delight bread for you.

And 50-year-old Penfolds Tawny Port for the Anglicans and maybe Grape Tizer for the Baptists. I'm an ex-Baptist. And then for the poor amongst you, well, you can come later on in the day once we've all finished.

And if there's any crumbs of bread left, you can have those. And I might grab some cheap wine vinegar from the kitchen cupboard for the cup. Now, if we did that, what would that say about our unity?

But what would it say about whether we loved one another or not? Or not, isn't it? But the Lord's Supper is not about eating and drinking your fill.

[9 : 31] Paul says you've got your own homes to do that in. Nor is it about selfishly promoting your wealthy status at the expense of others to be superior. Rather, it's about remembering and proclaiming Christ's sacrificial death for us all.

And so Paul cannot praise them for their supper. Instead, he must remind them about the real Lord's Supper. So we're at point 2, verse 23. He says, For I receive from the Lord what I also pass 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, you proclaim symbolically the Lord's death until he comes.

Here, notice Paul begins in verse 23 by reminding them that the tradition he's given them has come from the Lord Jesus himself. Which is why Paul echoes Jesus' words here from the Gospels at that very first Lord's Supper, where he changed the Passover meal into the Lord's Supper.

[10 : 53] And notice the Lord's Supper here wasn't a huge feast of gluttony and drunkenness. It was a meal that had symbolic moments.

So at the beginning of the night, Jesus took bread and he broke it after giving thanks. And that bread symbolized his death. Then it says after supper, after the meal, he then took the cup as a symbol of his blood.

And so you kind of got these symbolic elements that kind of bookend a fellowship meal in the middle. Of course, what we've done in our services is just taken the symbolic bits out and left the fellowship meal in between and not done that, which is both good and bad.

I'll come back to that later. But notice the symbolic bits are all about Jesus's sacrificial death for us, which was very different to the Corinthians who selfishly ate for themselves.

And so verse 23, for example, the Lord's Supper begins with a reminder that it happened on the night he was betrayed. In other words, just before he was crucified. Then in verse 24, we're told that the bread represents and not just his body, but his body given for you.

[12 : 04] In other words, given for them at the cross. It's interesting that in every gospel account of the Lord's Supper we have in the Bible, Jesus is recorded as breaking the bread.

And yet we're told on the next slide in John chapter 19 that there were no bones of Jesus's body actually broken. And so how does this broken bread symbolize his body if there are no broken bones?

Well, it symbolizes his body broken in death. That's the point. That's why in verse 23, we're told that Jesus says, this is my body, which is for you, given for you at the cross.

And so what I should really do at communion is get one loaf like this. And what Jesus would have been saying is, here we are, this bread broken is my body broken in death for you.

That's what you're supposed to remember. Do you get the point? And this is why the Roman Catholic teaching, which says that the bread literally turns into Christ's body is so wrong, because it's not as though we are nibbling on his big toe that walked on the water or nibbling on his hand that healed the sick.

[13 : 25] It's actually remembering not his body per se, but his body given in death, broken in death for us all. And it was for us all.

In verse 24, where it says, for you, the word you is plural, you know, for you's to use bad English. What's more, Paul's already said on the next slide in chapter 10, just before our chapter, that because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body, for we all share the one loaf.

You see, this bread symbolized his body given in death for them all, not just for the rich, not just for the poor, but for us all. And so how can the Corinthians now exclude some?

Do you see what Paul's getting at? Or again, take a look at verse 25. He says the blood is also a symbol of his sacrificial death for us all. The words for us all are not used.

The words new covenant are used, aren't they? In the Old Testament, God made a covenant or an agreement with Israel, which bound them together as God's one unified people.

[14 : 40] And the covenant was secured or signed with blood. We can read about that in Exodus. And the problem was the people broke their side of the covenant and sinned against God. And so God promised a new covenant in the Old Testament where he would give permanent forgiveness of sins and his spirit to help us not sin.

And that way we would continue to be in fellowship with him and each other as he's one people permanently. And so how can the Corinthians drink the cup of the Lord that has brought them into this permanent fellowship with God and each other?

And then at the same time, break this fellowship with divisions and exclusion. Do you see the implications Paul's trying to get them to think about? Or verse 26, Paul says, By taking part in the Lord's Supper, you are symbolically proclaiming Christ's sacrificial death to each other.

So again, how can they proclaim Christ's death to each other with bread and wine, while at the same time, excluding some by eating without them? Do you see what Paul's doing?

He reminds them of the true Lord's Supper, which is all about Christ's sacrificial death for us all, so that they might realize how far they've gone away from it.

[16 : 01] For to celebrate Christ's sacrificial death for them while selfishly not waiting for others, it's the height of hypocrisy. For it denied the unity that Christ's death has actually bought them.

And that the poor, they're saying that the poor did not belong as part of them. Imagine for a moment, you were denied entry into your work lunch provided by your boss.

You know, your boss puts on a work lunch and all the employees are there, you're one of the employees, but you're denied entry. How would that make you feel? Or, you know, your basketball team wins the grand final, and so you go out for a victory dinner, but only when you get to the restaurant, everyone else is there, but you'll say, no, you can't come in, sorry.

We're going to eat without you. Or you have a family meal, but then when you turn up, you're denied entry to it, even though you're part of the family. How would that make you feel? Left out? Put out? Angry?

Have a look at how God feels about this in our next section as we come to the consequences. Point three, verse 27. He says, Now, when we read this verse, we often think eating in an unworthy manner refers to being disrespectful or irreverent.

[17 : 26] And it includes that. I mean, the Corinthians were actually getting drunk during the Lord's Supper. That's pretty irreverent. But the big issue was how they were treating each other. And so the unworthy manner Paul seems to have in view in this passage is actually excluding fellow Christians from being part of God's church by causing divisions or humiliating them.

And he says to treat fellow Christians like that is basically to be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of Christ. It's to be guilty of mocking Christ's death that made them part of your church.

And that's serious for God. It's so serious that Paul says in verse 28, Everyone ought then for to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. Paul is saying we ought to examine ourselves.

And again, in this context, it's not just examining how we're going with God, but also how we're treating one another. Notice in verse 29, Paul talks about eating and drinking, but he only mentions the body of Christ.

[18 : 42] And that's because in this verse, the body of Christ he's talking about is the church. And so he's saying if you eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ, that is without considering your fellow Christians who are part of Christ's body, then you'll actually eat and drink judgment on yourself.

Do you see how serious God takes the way we treat each other? And this judgment is also pretty serious. Do you see verse 30? He says, That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have even fallen asleep.

That's not off during the sermon, by the way. That's died. Serious, isn't it? But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment.

Now, again, we need to be careful here that we don't equate every sickness or health issue we have with, you know, a sin that we might have done or a mistreatment of a fellow Christian.

A friend of ours remembered tripping over and grazing her knee when she was younger, and her mother said to her, Oh, well, you must have sinned to deserve that. I don't recommend that parenting technique, just for the record.

[19 : 54] You see, our suffering is often because we live in a fallen world. But sometimes, just sometimes, it could be of a particular ongoing sin like the Corinthians.

And so if we ask, it's still worth asking ourselves, Is there some unrepentant sin in my life that I'm not dealing with? Is this God's wake-up call for me?

As I said, it's usually not just being in a fallen world, but it certainly was a wake-up call for the Corinthians. It was God disciplining them so that they might not be judged on the last day.

Did you see 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.

You see, their sickness and even the death was part of God's loving discipline, for its aim was to save them from being condemned with the world on the last day. You see, if left unchecked, their sin could lead them to a hard heart, which would turn away from Christ and lead them to hell.

[21 : 05] But God will keep his people to the end, we're told. And part of the way he does that is even sometimes having to give them a hard wake-up call like sickness and suffering.

Now, I realize, of course, it's a bit hard for those who have died to repent, isn't it? But I take it God knew that if he left them much longer, their hard hearts would lead them away from Christ.

And so God calls them to fall asleep, to die now, so that they might be saved from hell later. And if left with a choice between a few more years on earth now or eternal life in heaven later, which one is better?

But the thing these consequences really highlight for us is that God loves his church. He takes the unity of his church and the growth of all its members seriously, doesn't he? So seriously that those who divide his church or exclude some are judged.

Now, while these consequences are serious, the solution is quite simple. See verse 33? He says, So then, my brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat, you should all eat together.

[22 : 15] Anyone who is hungry should eat something at home so that when you meet together, it may not result in judgment. And when I come, I will give further directions. In other words, Paul is saying the Lord's Supper is not about feeding your face like an all-you-can-eat place.

If you're hungry and you can't wait for others, well, eat something at home first so that when you do come together, you can wait and then eat together as a sign of your unity in Christ.

Well, what does all this mean for us, our final point? Well, first, we need to realize what the Lord's Supper is. It's for Christians to remember Christ's sacrificial death.

But in the Bible, remembering has an active sense to it. So when God remembered Israel in Egypt, he didn't go, oh, oops, sorry, I forgot you guys.

He remembered by acting to save them out of Egypt. And so when we come to the Lord's Supper in a little while and remember his death, we're to do it in an active way.

[23 : 22] We're to pause and reflect afresh on his death for us rather than just going through the motions. In fact, Paul says on the next slide from 1 Corinthians 10, he says that as we eat and drink, we are actually participating afresh in Christ's body and blood for us.

Each time we come to the Lord's Supper, we're reapplying it to ourselves, remembering afresh. And so don't go simply through the motions in a little while. Instead, when you come up, pause and reflect from it.

I know we're pushed for time. I know there's a cube behind you and I need to work it, trying to work out how to create more time. But pause and reflect afresh that Christ would actually die for you, for me.

That his blood would be spilt for me, for you. For as we do, the Spirit often works through this food to reaffirm our unity and strengthen our faith.

I remember giving communion one time to someone and as they were down the front, I noticed that they had tears in their eyes because they had reflected on Christ's death and it struck them afresh that the Son of God would leave his throne in heaven and come to earth to bleed for them.

[24 : 43] And it just kind of struck them, overwhelmed them, humbled them, and encouraged them. Now, I'm not saying the Spirit will move us in this way every time we have communion, nor am I saying that you have to reflect for at least 43.5 seconds before the Spirit works.

It's not some magical formula, but I am saying that the Lord's Supper involves an active remembering, not just going through the motions. And as we do, the Spirit often affirms us and strengthens us in the faith.

So that's what the Lord's Supper is. Second, we need to realize what the Lord's Supper is not. Despite the talk of unity, the Lord's Supper is actually not for non-Christians because they have not yet been united to Christ.

After all, how can a non-Christian reflect afresh on Christ's death for them if they have not yet accepted Christ's death for them? And so if you're not a Christian here this morning, then do first, please put your faith in Jesus.

believe in Him. Say sorry to God for living a life that ignored Him. Thank God that Christ paid for your sin at the cross and ask God to help you follow Jesus.

[25 : 58] And once you've done that, then come forward and remember Christ's death for you. And for us Christians, the Lord's Supper is not a more mystical means of encouragement.

For we can reflect afresh on Christ's death for us in the Bible too. In fact, the Spirit strengthen us through the Bible as well. The only difference with the Lord's Supper is that it uses tangible symbols which engage our other senses like touch and taste.

And this can sometimes help us to reflect afresh more easily. But the Lord's Supper is not a better, more mystical way than God's Word. And we can sometimes think that.

But God's Spirit strengthens us through both. But thirdly, the big issue in this chapter is really not about the Lord's Supper but about how we treat one another.

For we cannot practice divisive behavior that excludes some on the one hand and then share communion, which is from the Latin word sharing in common, on the other.

[27 : 02] It's not only hypocritical, it's also dangerous. For we are mocking Christ's death that has united us, which means we are inviting God to judge us.

So the question is, do we take the unity of our church seriously? And if we do, we won't cause divisions. That doesn't mean we can't disagree over who will win the final next Saturday.

I don't know who to go for, the Collingwood or the West Coast, but we can disagree, we can have fun, all that sort of thing. But it does mean we won't only talk to our friends and ignore those people who are hard to talk to.

It does mean that we won't do what one church not far from us did. One of our members who is with us now is poor and has some mental health issues.

And after a short time of being at this other church, the senior leadership asked him to leave because he was just too hard to handle. We won't do that, will we? Or I remember another church, some members were holding a church outing which was quite expensive and ended up causing divisions between the rich who could afford the excursion and the poor who could not.

[28 : 15] And when the organiser of this trip was told this, they simply said, oh well, it'll just be for us rich people then, like it was a joke. But it wasn't. Now obviously, not every event can cater for every person.

I mean a women's event does not cater for men, does it? We have to be content with what God has given us, but the attitude of the organiser was divisive and unloving.

And for us here, I suspect we need to watch that we don't cause divisions over race. We are a multicultural church which is terrific. It's a real glimpse of the gospel uniting people from every nation together as one body of Christ.

But we need to make sure that our cultural differences don't lead one group to exclude another or to continually complain about another. It's very easy to do.

Instead, we need to keep working hard, which I know you do, to include one another, to work together, to be united. For Christ's death has done that, has united us.

[29 : 19] And not only are we to avoid divisive behaviour, we're also on the flip side to foster fellowship and unity. Even more so because we don't have a fellowship meal as part of our Lord's Supper.

We just have the symbolic bits, which as I said is both good and bad. It's good in that, you know, it means we don't have to try and squeeze in a whole meal every time we have the Lord's Supper, which would actually effectively exclude the next congregation from meeting at their service because we go over time.

But it's also bad in that it means we miss out a bit on the horizontal relationship, you know, encouraging our fellowship and unity together. And so we need to work all the more harder to foster fellowship and unity.

I know not all of us are extroverts. In fact, most of us are introverts. So I'm not saying we have to run ourselves in the ground by constant social engagements, but we ought to be willing to practice hospitality, to ring people up.

Let's go out for a coffee. It doesn't have to be much food. But just practice unity. And lastly, we need to foster fellowship and unity, not just through food, but also through forgiveness.

[30 : 25] You see, there will always be people who rub us the wrong way. And in a church of our size, I'm sure there's people who have insulted you inadvertently or maybe deliberately. I don't know.

We need to be willing to seek forgiveness and then to give it because God has done it for us. And by his forgiveness, he has united us together as the one body of Christ.

And so we need to live it out. Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for this reminder this morning about how important you see our unity together as your church.

As so important that you gave your one and only son, Jesus, to die for us so that we might be united together as your people. And so Father, we pray that you would help us to live out this unity by the way we treat one another.

And particularly as we come to the Lord's table where we express our unity with Christ and each other, help us to come knowing that we've worked hard on our relationships with you and one another, that we might not eat and drink judgment on ourselves.

[31 : 36] Help us in this, we pray for Jesus' sake. Amen. Amen.