

Honouring the Body of Christ

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Preacher: Andrew Price

- [0 : 0 0] It happened to me just a couple of weeks ago at home, actually. I was just ten minutes late for dinner, just ten minutes, and the jolly kids had eaten it all. The stir-fry pan was empty.
- I was so disappointed. I felt neglected. I felt like I was no longer part of the family. I went off to KFC down the road. And then I came back and ate it in front of them.
- Not very mature, I know. But you see, food does more than fill us. Food also has this funny way of fostering fellowship amongst us.
- And so when you eat together with friends or with family, it often expresses your unity, that you belong with them. But it also enables you to strengthen your relationships with them.
- That's why we often wait for everyone to sit down at the table before you start eating together, so that we can express our unity as friends or family.
- [1 : 0 0] If you turn up late to dinner like I did and there's nothing left, then you feel on the outer. You don't feel like you belong, you feel like you don't belong. And even if you've turned up to a party late for some other reason, and there's still some food left, but you still feel awkward, don't you?
- Because they've already eaten and moved on, and you're kind of sitting in the corner just having your finger food trying to catch up. You don't feel like you belong. The point is, food can foster fellowship when done together.
- But it can also create divisions when people are left out. And that's what the Corinthian church was doing. They were leaving people out. What's more, their church meals were also meant to include the Lord's Supper as an extra part of the meal, where they gathered to remember Christ's death for them, an expression of their unity with Christ.
- But instead, they were leaving people out so that their meals were creating divisions, disunity, and end up denying Christ's death that brought them together as one church.
- So at point one in your outlines, verse 17 in your Bibles, have a look there. In the following directives, I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good.
- [2 : 1 6] And so he begins here. Last week in our controversial passage, he began in chapter 11, verse 2, by saying that he praised them for holding to some traditions, just as he instructed them.
- But when it came to this directive, this command about the Lord's Supper, he has no praise for them. In fact, he says that their meetings to celebrate the Lord's Supper actually do more harm than good.
- In other words, they're better off not meeting together as church. Isn't that extraordinary? To tell a church you're better off not meeting as church. What's wrong?
- Well, verse 18, 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's a second place and a third place and a few other problems. Later on in verse 34, the last sentence of our passage today, he talks about coming and giving them further instructions.

- [3 : 24] In other words, he'll deal with these other issues later. But this first problem of divisions needs attention now. For although they are coming together, verse 18, they are not acting like they're together.

Instead, there are divisions. And these divisions are not the sort we saw earlier this year from chapter one. Remember, some of them were trying to outdo each other about being spiritually superior, saying, well, I follow poor.

Well, I'm better because I follow a polis and so on. I tried to liken it to a time where I was joking with a friend because the minister who married Michelle and myself had just become a bishop. So I said to him, well, bishop married us.

The only problem was this guy was married by a minister who'd just become the archbishop. And so he said, well, I was married by an archbishop. And that was the divisions back in chapter one. These divisions here, though, are different.

It's between the rich who have stuff and the poor who have not much stuff. And given the Corinthians were prone to divisions to try and make themselves look superior, then Paul, verse 18, has no trouble believing there's more divisions amongst them.

- [4 : 32] In fact, in verse 19, he gets rather sarcastic, I think, and says, no doubt there have to be differences among you to show who's more spiritual. I think he's being sarcastic.

Because Paul then goes on to say that such divisions end up meaning that the meal you're celebrating has stopped being the Lord's Supper. Have a look at verse 20 to 21.

He says, 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 another gets drunk. You see, the Corinthian church would often meet regularly in smaller houses.

But from time to time, they would come together as a whole church in a bigger house, usually a person who's wealthy, because that's the ones that have the bigger houses. We don't know how often they did this, but we do know that the Lord's Supper occurred on this sort of whole church gathering.

- [5 : 33] And it seems to be part of a bigger meal where they'd have a fellowship meal, but also another part to celebrate the Lord's Supper in particular. But we've got to remember Sunday was not a day off for them.

The poor still had to work and did not have much to bring to this fellowship meal. The rich, on the other hand, brought lots of food and drink and they didn't have to work.

And so it seems like they started eating and drinking early, even to the point of getting drunk. So that by the time the poor got there, well, there's no food left.

You know, the stir fry pan was empty, except for maybe some wine for the Lord's Supper, which came usually at the very end. But Paul says, if you're doing that, it's no longer the Lord's Supper that you're doing.

For you cannot celebrate the death of our Saviour on the one hand, while humiliating and despising his people on the other. You can't do that. And that's exactly what the rich had done by excluding the poor.

- [6 : 36] Do you see verse 22? He says, 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. You see, there may have been social divisions between the rich and the poor outside the church, but they were bringing those divisions into the church.

And so despising God's church, humiliating the poor, causing divisions when God's church has been united by God's Son.

It would be like us having the Lord's Supper, but creating two time slots. You know, the rich amongst us, I was going to say all those who drive a certain sort of car, but I thought, oh, I'm going to offend someone.

But anyway, the rich amongst us would be served during the service. We'd have baker's delight bread. We'd have penfolds, 50-year-old tawny port, or apple ties or grape ties for those who don't drink.

[7 : 39] And then the poor, well, they could come after the service, after we'd all gone home. They could have some leftover crumbs and maybe some cheap wine vinegar from the kitchen cupboard. Now, if we did that, what would that say about our unity?

Not a lot, would it? What would that say about how we loved each other or not? The Lord's Supper is not about eating and drinking your fill.

Paul says you can do that in your own home. Nor is it about selfishly promoting your wealthy status at the expense of others. Rather, it's about remembering Christ's death for us all.

And so Paul cannot praise them for their supper. Instead, he must remind them of the real Lord's Supper. At point 2, verse 23. He says, For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you symbolically proclaim, the Lord's death until he comes.

Here, Paul begins by reminding them that the tradition he has given them has come from Jesus himself. It's why Paul echoes Jesus' words here that we see in the Gospels.

[9 : 14] And notice the Lord's Supper here was not a huge feast of gluttony and drunkenness. It was a meal that had symbolic moments. And so at the beginning of the night, we read that Jesus broke bread after he gave thanks to God.

And that symbolized his body in death. And then after the fellowship meal, after the supper, we're told, he then took the cup as a symbol of his blood. And so you've got this meal bookended by these symbolic moments of bread at the start and the cup at the end.

Of course, what we've done in our services is we're just taking those symbolic moments and left out the fellowship meal in between. And that's both a good and a bad thing. And I'll come back to that later.

But notice the symbolic bits at the beginning, at the end, they're all about Christ's sacrificial death for us, which is very different to the Corinthians who selfishly ate for themselves.

And so Paul's aim here in reminding us about the true Lord's Supper is so that the Corinthians might see how far they've moved away from it. And it's all about Christ's sacrificial death, isn't it?

[10 : 24] Verse 23, the night before he was betrayed, in other words, the night before he was arrested and sentenced to death. Verse 24, we're told that the bread represents not just his body, but his body broken in death for us.

It's interesting, by the way, that every gospel account of the Lord's Supper in the Bible records Jesus breaking bread and then saying, this is my body, which is for you.

And yet we know elsewhere on the next slide, in fact, in John 19, that not one bone in Jesus's body was actually broken. And so how does a broken bread symbolize a body where there was no bones broken?

Well, it symbolizes his body broken in death. I mean, we kind of know that intuitively, don't we? That's why in verse 23, Jesus broke bread then said, this is my body, which is given for you.

At the cross. And so what I should really do at communion is kind of get one loaf of bread like this Baker's Delight bread here. And what Jesus would have done to try and get the effect, he would have gone, this is my body broken for you in death.

[11 : 36] That's what I'm doing for you guys. Not in terms of bones, but in terms of death. And remembering this helps us to realize why that another reason why the Roman Catholic teaching where the bread, they say, turns into the literal flesh of Jesus.

Well, it's not talking about his body per se. It's talking about his body in death. It's as though we're nibbling on his big toe that walked on water or his hand that healed the sick.

It's about remembering his body given for you at the cross in death. And his death was for them all. The word you there is plural. For you's, he's saying.

And what's more, Paul has already said on the next slide in chapter 10, verse 17. Just a chapter earlier. He says, Because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body. For we all share.

In other words, we all share in the one loaf. In other words, Christ's body was given for us all. And so how can the rich Corinthians now exclude some of the poor?

[12 : 41] Christ's body was given not just for the rich. And in fact, not just for the poor. But for us all. Do you see how Paul's subtly reminding them what they're doing is so incompatible with the true Lord's Supper?

Or again, in verse 25, his blood, we're told, symbolized his sacrificial death for us all. The words for us all are not used, but the words new covenant are.

Do you see that? In the Old Testament, God made a covenant or an agreement with Israel, which bound them together as God's one people. And that covenant was secured or signed with blood.

Exodus 24, verse 8. The problem was people broke their side of the agreement and sinned against God. And so God promised a new covenant, Jeremiah 31, where he would give permanent forgiveness for sins, would remember their sins no more.

It was just very liberating, actually. And he would give us his spirit to help us not sin. And that way we could continue in a permanent fellowship as God's one people.

[13 : 48] So how can the Corinthians drink the cup of the Lord that brought them into this permanent fellowship with God and each other? And then on the other hand, deny that fellowship by rejecting the poor?

Did you see what he's saying? Verse 26, Paul says, by taking part in the Lord's Supper, we are proclaiming Christ's sacrificial death to each other. And so again, how can they proclaim Christ's death to each other with bread and wine?

Well, at the same time, excluding the poor as though Christ did not die for them. You see, Paul is reminding 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 from it.

For to celebrate Christ's sacrificial death while selfishly not waiting for others, it's the height of hypocrisy. It denied the unity that Christ's death has actually established amongst us.

And that it sent a signal that the poor no longer belonged as part of the church. And can you imagine, you know, your boss puts on a work dinner for you, or your other colleagues are there, but you're not allowed in.

[15 : 03] How would you feel? Or your basketball team wins the grand final, and you go out for victory dinner, except the restaurant doors are shut and locked for you.

Can't go in. Or your family is having a family dinner, except they don't tell you about it. Everyone else is told. They just leave you out. How would you feel? You know, left out, put out, angry?

Have a look at how God feels in the following verses, which brings us to the consequences. Point 3, verse 27. He says, And now to start with, when we read in an unworthy manner, we often think it refers to being disrespectful at communion or irreverent.

And it might include that after all the Corinthians were getting drunk during the Lord's Supper. But remember, the big issue was how they were treating each other, divisions in the church. And so the unworthy manner Paul seems to have on view is excluding fellow Christians from being part of God's church, causing divisions and humiliating them.

And he says, To treat fellow Christians like that is to be actually guilty of Christ's very body and blood yourself. It's to be guilty of mocking Christ's death, the very death that brought these poor as part of your church.

[16 : 33] It's to be like the people who nailed him to the cross that very first Good Friday. That's how serious God thought their behavior was. Their treatment of one another was basically killing his son.

So no wonder Paul says in verse 28, A person or everyone ought 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, the church, eat and drink judgment on themselves.

Paul says we should examine ourselves. And again, in this context, it's not just saying, Or have I been going with God? It's also, how am I going with each other in the church?

Notice in verse 29, Paul talks about eating and drinking, but then he only mentions the body of Christ. That's because he's using the phrase body of Christ to refer to the church.

And so he's saying, If you eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ, without considering your fellow Christians, you know, by excluding them or being in broken relationship with them, then you are actually eating and drinking judgment on yourself.

[17 : 45] It's pretty serious, isn't it? And if you're not convinced, look at some of the ways they were being judged. Verse 30. He says, That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.

That doesn't mean literally, like as Paul preached, people fell asleep in the sermon. That's talking about death. And he says, But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment.

Do you see how seriously God takes the treatment of one another? Now, of course, we need to be careful at this point that we don't equate every sickness we have with, you know, a specific sin that we might have done or a mistreatment against a fellow Christian.

A friend of ours remembers growing up and she tripped over a rock one time, grazed her knee, and her mother said to her, Oh, well, you must have sinned to deserve that. It's not a parenting technique that I'm recommending.

You see, our suffering is often because we live in a fallen world, isn't it? But sometimes it could be because of a persistent or ongoing sin in our lives, like the Corinthians.

[19 : 02] And so if we ask, it's worth asking ourselves the question, at least, you know, is there an unrepentant sin in my life? Is God giving me a wake-up call here? Usually it's just part of living in a fallen world, but it's worth asking the question, because that's what the case was for the Corinthians.

It was a wake-up call, a form of discipline, lest they end up facing judgment in hell. Do 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 their death was part of God's actually loving discipline, for it aimed to save them from being condemned with the world on judgment day.

You see, if left unchecked, their sin could lead their hearts to being hardened, and then walking away from Christ into hell. But God will keep his people to the end.

And part of the way he does that is even causing them to suffer, so that they might turn back to him. Now, I realize it's a bit hard for those who've died to repent, isn't it? But I take it God knew that if he left them much longer, their hearts would become hard, and they would walk away from Christ.

[20 : 21] And so God calls them to fall asleep, to die in the faith that they still had, lest they walk away and face hell. And left with a choice between a few more years on earth now, or eternal life in heaven, a new creation later, what choice would you make?

But the thing these consequences really highlight for us is that God loves his church. He takes our unity seriously, and the growth of all its members seriously.

So seriously that those who divide his church, or exclude some members from fellowship, are judged. And while these consequences are serious, the solution is very simple.

See verse 33? So then, my brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat, you should all eat together. 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 you further instructions. In other words, Paul is saying, look, if you turn up, and you're really starving, you can't help, you can't wait, then have something at home first.

[21 : 29] Then come and turn up, so you can wait and eat together. So over food, you can foster your fellowship as one church.

United by Christ's blood and body at the cross. What does all this mean for us? Point four. Well, firstly, we need to realize what the Lord's Supper is.

It's for Christians to remember Christ's death for us. Now, I know you know that, or at least I hope you know that. But do you know that remembering in the Bible has this active sense to it?

When God remembers Israel in Egypt, he doesn't go, oh yeah, that's right. I had a people down there. I better do something about it. He remembers them by acting to save them. And so when we come to the Lord's Supper in a couple of weeks time, we had to remember actively by pausing and reflecting, not just going through the motions, but going, yeah, Jesus' body was actually given at the cross for me.

His blood was actually shed at the cross for me. For as we do this reflecting, this reflecting afresh, the Spirit often works through this little bit of food to reaffirm our fellowship with Christ and strengthen us in our faith in Him.

[22 : 50] I remember giving communion one time here, I think it was over here, and I noticed that the person actually had tears, just not crying, but that they had teary eyes.

Because as they were reflecting on Christ's death for them, it struck them afresh. How extraordinary it was that the Son of God would give up His throne, come to earth and bleed for them, and just hit them, humbled them, and warmed the hearts of them.

Now, I'm not saying that the Spirit will move us this way all the time, nor am I saying it's a matter of reflecting for the right amount, you know, 43.5 seconds, the Spirit comes, unless anymore it doesn't work.

No, it's not a magical formula like that. But I am saying that the Lord's Supper involves an active remembering of Christ's death for us, through which the Spirit affirms our unity and strengthens us in our faith.

But second, we need to realize what the Lord's Supper is not. And despite all this talk about unity, it's actually not for non-Christians, because they're not united with Christ yet, are they?

[23 : 59] I mean, how can they reflect afresh on Christ's death for them, if they've not accepted Christ's death for them in the first place? And so if you're not a Christian here this morning, then first do put your trust in Jesus.

Say sorry to God for living a life that ignored God. Thank God that Christ paid for our sins. And then ask God to help you follow Jesus. And once you've prayed that, then come in a couple of weeks time and join in communion at 1030.

And for us Christians, we also need to realize that the Lord's Supper is not a more mystical means of encouragement. For we can reflect afresh on Christ's death for us, even in the Bible, can't we?

And the Spirit strengthens us through his word in the Bible too. The only difference is the Lord's Supper uses tangible symbols, which encourage our other senses, like our taste and our touch.

And that sometimes helps us to reflect afresh more easily. And finally, thirdly and finally, the big issue in our chapter is really about how we treat one another at church.

[25 : 10] For we cannot practice divisive behavior that excludes some on the one hand, and then come for communion from the Latin word to share in common on the other.

It's hypocritical. More than that, it's dangerous. For we are mocking Christ's death that has united us, and we are inviting God to judge us.

And so the question is, do we take our unity in Christ seriously? And if we do, then first we won't cause divisions. We won't continue clicks.

And I'm really encouraged, because I know there's a number of people here who deliberately change seats. They move from different locations, because they felt like, oh, I know the people only in this section. I don't know people in the other section of the church.

And so they've deliberately moved seats here at church at 1030, which is terrific, because they don't want to cause divisions in church. And we're not to be like another church not too far from here.

[26 : 11] We've got a member who's with us now, but he was with them before, and he was, or he still is poor, and he has mental health issues. And he was with this other church for a while, but after a while, the leadership said, please leave, you're too much work.

Can you imagine that? Now, he's a lot of work, but don't do that. Or another person that I know of, they were organizing an excursion.

I'm an ex-teacher, that's what you call it, an outing, that's what you call it. And it's quite an expensive place. It was for retirees, and there was lots of retirees who just couldn't afford it, because they were on the pension. And so when we pointed this out to this organizer, she said, oh, well, it would just be for us rich people then.

I don't think she realized what she was saying. Now, obviously, not every event can cater for every person. I mean, a women's event does not cater for men. It doesn't work like that.

And we need to be content with what God has given us, but we need to have that right attitude, don't we, where we work to make sure we don't cause divisions. And on the flip side, we need to work to foster fellowship.

[27 : 21] We don't have the fellowship part of the meal with the Lord's Supper here at church. We've only got the bookends, you know, the bread at the start, the cup at the end, which means we need to keep working even harder at using food to foster fellowship.

And so when there's chicken and chip lunch on, which is next Sunday, I think, do what you can to stay, to talk with someone you may not know, to foster fellowship. Or when we have the lunches, the men's and women's lunches, or the farm next Saturday.

I know we can't all make these things. In fact, I've got to go to a wedding and then do a christening next Saturday, so I can't make the farm myself. But if you can, do what you can to foster fellowship, because we are united in Christ by his death.

And finally, we got to do what we can to foster our unity through forgiveness as well, because there's always going to be people in a church of this size that kind of rub us the wrong way, you know.

You're probably all thinking about that person right now, aren't you? We need to be willing to forgive or seek forgiveness, just as God has forgiven us in Christ, that we might maintain our unity in him.

[28 : 34] In other words, we are to honour Christ's body, the church, by being united and not divided. Let's pray. Our gracious Father, we do thank you for this reminder of what Christ's death has done for us.

It has brought us forgiveness and united us in fellowship as the body of Christ. And so, Father, we pray that you might help us to work hard, not to cause divisions, but to foster fellowship.

And particularly, as we come to the Lord's Supper, to make sure we've done what we can to be reconciled with others, so that we're not hypocrites by sharing in the Lord's Supper.

help us in these things, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.