

1 Corinthians 11:17-34 PM

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[0 : 00] Father, may the riches of your grace shine through the poverty of my words, so that the words of my mouth and the many meditations of our hearts may be pleasing and acceptable in your sight. O Lord, our Maker and our Redeemer. Amen.

You may be seated. If you're new and you don't know me, my name is Jordan, and I have the privilege of ministering alongside Aaron and Chris, and it's absolutely wonderful to be with you this evening.

We're dropping into a letter that was written from someone named Paul of Tarsus. The Apostle Paul, they called him. And it was somebody who in the first century was commissioned by Jesus himself.

So the word apostle means sent one. So was sent by Jesus himself to speak the good news about who Jesus is and what he had done to all nations. So Jesus himself was a Jewish person, but he gave Paul the particular task of taking this message about who Jesus was beyond the Jews to all the different peoples and language and ethnicities in the Middle Eastern world.

And so what we're dropping into is we're dropping into one of 13 letters written by this special messenger sent by Jesus to bring the good news to all peoples and nations and tongues around the world.

[1 : 27] And he's writing to a little church in the big city of Corinth. It's a letter written by Paul to a very impressive church in a very impressive city.

They have people who are wealthy. They have great orators and speakers who are eloquent and intelligent. They have incredible gatherings and really exciting services. And they are full of clever and gifted and influential people.

And yet Paul says there's one major problem you have. You have not yet been transformed by the message that you preach. You have not yet been conformed to the message that you preach.

So if I was to give a simple title to our passage this evening, it would be this. Live what you preach. Because it addresses a common problem in the church of Jesus Christ.

And if you're new to the church, it's important for you to know this. We're not holier than anybody else. If you come to the church, one thing you'll discover is that sometimes we can say one thing and we can do another.

[2 : 28] Sometimes we can act in such a way that contradicts the very message that we gather to celebrate and share. And Paul says these things should not be so. If you look with me in verse 26, and I encourage you, if you have one of the Bibles in front of you in the pew, that black book or blue book, to turn to page 958.

And in verse 26, Paul points them to a special meal that they celebrate and how it proclaims the central message of the Christian faith.

He says, verse 26, chapter 11. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, it's referring to the celebration of what we call the Lord's Supper, the special meal.

You proclaim the Lord's death until he comes again. So this is wonderful because this takes us to the heart of 1 Corinthians. It is a letter focused on gospel application.

What does the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ mean for my life, and how do I live it out, both communally and personally? And in the first four chapters of this book, Paul addresses the way in which Christ speaks to the fighting and biting and arrogance and jealousy that has infected the church and brought division in the church.

[3 : 49] And he says, come back to Jesus, come back and be united under his grace. And then in verses, in chapters 5 to 7, Paul addresses the sexual immorality and the church's various responses to it.

And he says, come back to Jesus and come back to the gospel purity that is found under his grace. And then in chapters 8 to 10, Paul addresses idolatry and this rights-based living.

And he says, come back to Jesus, come back to this gospel love that is found in his grace. And now as we get in chapter 11 through 14, Paul is dealing with issues related to the church's gatherings. So when we gather together on days like this, how do we relate to one another and what do we do? And Paul is saying the goal of what we do should be to build one another up, should be to love one another in the name of the Lord Jesus.

And so you get this wonderfully comprehensive picture throughout this letter that there is no area of life to which Jesus' goodness and grace and glory does not speak and does not transform.

[4 : 56] Now that being said, today's passage is a word of warning in particular. It's a word of warning to a church that is divided. So there's a problem in Corinth.

The body is divided. When they gather together, they're not united. They have factions and they have schisms. So look at verses 17 and 18 with me. Paul just lays it out right at the beginning. 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. Why? For in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you.

And the word that Paul uses there is a Greek word that actually can be translated schisms. So Paul is saying when you come together, instead of being united, there's actually divisions and schisms revealed.

And this is especially revealed when you're coming to celebrate the Lord's Supper. And for Paul, this is a really serious thing. Because if you turn the page over to chapter 10, verse 17, he says to us that the meaning of the Lord's Supper is intimately connected to being a united community in the Lord Jesus.

[6 : 07] Verse 17. Because there is one bread that we share, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

So what Paul is saying is, Paul is saying if you come together to share the Lord's Supper, that is something that is meant to be a symbol of the unity that you have in the Lord Jesus Christ. Yet when you come together, it's only revealing that there are divisions.

So the way you're relating to one another is actually contradicting the symbolism of the meal that you have come together to celebrate. Does that kind of make sense? So you've come together to celebrate this meal.

It has a particular meaning, but the way you're celebrating it is contradicting the very meaning of that meal. Now this is where it gets really interesting for Paul. Because Paul, he points to what is the cause of these divisions in the church.

What is the cause of these schisms? And Paul does not say it's something that has to do with the head. It's something doctrinal. It's something theological. It's something that I could write on a paper or in a book. Paul says it is something sociological.

[7 : 11] It's something relational. It's a group dynamic going on here. He's saying the divisions among you are rooted in social selfishness. Look at verse 20 with me.

He lays this out. When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat. He's getting to this contradiction. Verse 21. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal, one goes hungry, and another gets drunk.

Verse 22. 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. It's as if the Corinthians are asking Paul, will you give us a letter of recommendation?

And Paul's saying, no, I'm not going to give you a letter of recommendation. So what's really going on here? Like, what's the situation? It's hard to say because we don't, we weren't there. So we don't have all the details of the historical situation.

[8 : 15] But there are some things that we can surmise. There are some things that seem to be fairly clear. And the first is this, is that the church is gathering for some form of public dinner.

And in the Greco-Roman world, they have different forms of public dinners that had different kind of expectations when you came together. But there was a particular form of dinner where people would come together and they would bring their own food.

So it was almost like dinner picnic styles. And when they came together, what could happen is if you're doing dinner picnic styles, you're bringing your own food. food. So if you're somebody that doesn't have a lot of money and you're bringing like Carl's Jr. or, um, that's, that's an American thing, isn't it?

Carl's Jr. is an American thing. So name a Canadian fast food restaurant. What's it? What?

Subway. Let's go with Subway. That's my daughter's favorite, Subway.

And so somebody brings Subway and it costs them \$5. And then somebody goes to this really high level dim sum restaurant and brings a \$50 dish. And they bring it.

[9 : 17] Or some person brings a little snack. They don't have much. Another person brings a whole feast. So at this picnic meal, it could be revealed how much money you have or how little money you have right off the bat.

This class and wealth distinction. And there's, so this could go a couple different ways. Paul here could be talking about like a chronological issue in the sense that some people, the wealthy are coming early and they're coming with loads of food and then they're just feasting themselves on the food.

But they're not waiting for those that are a bit poor and have less means. They're just going ahead with the meal. And then when the poor come, there's not a whole lot for them to eat. Or Paul could be describing what is, what may be like a spatial issue.

It's not chronological. They don't wait for other people. But it's more spatial. And in the ancient world, the church often met in houses, the houses of wealthy people. And wealthy Roman houses were designed with two kind of eating areas.

There was an indoor eating area, which could hold about eight to ten people. And there were couches in it so people could lay down and recline while they were eating. And that's where they would serve the best food and the most food.

[10 : 30] And then there was a different room, which was an atrium, which was literally outside. So you have the in group and the out group. And the outside room could serve about 20 to 30 people. But it was like standing or sitting room only.

They didn't have all the luscious couches. And the sorts of food that they would serve there would often be a lower tier than the food that they were serving inside. So think of like Downton Abbey's upstairs-downstairs sort of situation.

You guys watched Downton Abbey before? Wow, that was surprisingly not many of you. That's some homework for you to go do when you get home. Watch Downton Abbey.

You all understand this. Either way you look at it, Paul is addressing a situation that reveals there are social and economic and class distinctions in Corinth that are seeping their way into the community of the church.

So when the church gathers, instead of looking different from the class distinctions and the culture around them, they are actually reflecting them in the way they relate to each other. Guests of different rank are served very different dishes and very different wines in very different according to their respective dignities based on their classes.

[11 : 45] So whatever the situation, the social message that is communicated is very clear. If the issue Paul is addressing is people, some people are not waiting for others before they feast, then what they are saying to those others is you are not worth waiting for.

And if the issue is that there are two different rooms that they're feasting in and one room is the in-group and the other room is the out-group, then what the in-group is saying is they're saying to the others, you're not in the in-group, we are.

So the first, in effect, says if you don't wait for people to join the table in that world, meals were about belonging to a family. If you don't wait for people to join, then you're saying you're not part of the family.

And if you decide that you're going to have meals in different rooms that look very different, then you're saying you may be part of the family, but you're actually a second-class citizen in this family. And that's why Paul, in verse 22, says when you act this way when you gather the Lord's Supper, you are despising the church of God and humiliating those who have nothing.

It's hard to conceive of Paul using more intense and strong language than this. I mean, the only other time in the New Testament that I'm aware of these two words, of despising and humiliating being used in the same sentence, is in Hebrews chapter 12, verse 2.

[13:11] It goes like this. Looking to Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, despising the shame.

You could say despising the humiliation. So despise and humiliate is what the religious and political leaders do to Jesus when they nail him to the cross. And despising the humiliation is what Jesus does when he endures the cross for the joy of seeking to save us.

And Paul is saying that if you gather together to partake of the Lord's Supper in such a way that even hints at there being class distinctions in the church, it is to treat the church of God in the same way that the world treated the Son of God when they nailed him to the cross.

That is why Paul goes on to say in verse 27, Whoever, therefore, eats and drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty.

And this is a legal term meaning liable in the court of law. Will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. And so then Paul introduces that very serious theme of judgment.

[14:27] Now, like I said, it's hard to conceive of stronger language than this. But it's important for us to remember, Paul is talking about divisions in the church, revealed in their gatherings, that are caused not by intellectual theology or doctrinal divergence, but by social negligence and personal indulgence.

So why is this such a big deal to Paul? I think it's because social divisions in the church contradict the reality that the Lord's Supper proclaims.

And it's this. It's that all have fallen short of the glory of God. It's that none are worthy to gather up the crumbs under his table. It's that everyone has nothing to offer and everything to receive when they come to the Lord Jesus.

The point of the Lord's Supper is grace upon grace. Like we're all equally in need of grace. And we're all equally welcomed by the Lord Jesus to receive grace.

And so to eat and drink in any way that seems to compromise that message is to eat and drink judgment on oneself. So having given this really serious word to the community, to the church in Corinth, what is the way forward that Paul possibly suggests out of this illness?

[15:42] If he's diagnosed the problem and the illness, then what is the road to recovery? And what will happen if we choose not to walk in it? And this is the point that Paul gets at in verses 27 to 34.

He gives two practical pastoral directions. Are you all with me? Everybody okay? I know this is a lot. There's a bit more to come.

But this is going to get a little more practical. He gives two pastoral directions for how you partake of the Lord's Supper. He says in verse 28, assess your attitude.

And then in verse 33, adjust your action. Assess your attitude, then adjust your action. So number one, assess your attitude as you prepare to partake of the Lord's Supper.

Look at verse 27 with me. 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. Verse 28.

[16:42] Let a person, here it is, examine himself. Then and so eat of the bread and the drink of the cup. Verse 29. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, note that phrase, we'll come back to it, eats and drinks judgment on himself.

So according to Paul, eating and drinking at the Lord's Supper has implications that no other meal will ever have. So we can't approach it lightly or wantonly or unadvisedly or irreverently, as the traditional wedding liturgy puts it.

It is a holy and weighty matter in the sight of Almighty God, our Heavenly Father. It's actually quite amazing. You see this little book in the back of your pew?

It's a little red book. This is called A Book of Common Prayer. If you are new to Anglicanism, this is one of the oldest things we have in this building. It's about 400 or 500 years old.

And it's wonderful on page 88. At the very bottom of page 88. You don't have to go there, but you can if you want. There's something called exhortation, so encouragements, that if you were going to partake of this meal of the Lord's Supper, how should you prepare to partake of it?

[17:57] And it says there are two times a year, Advent and Lent, when you should read this in public. At the very bottom, the very last sentence, goes like this.

He's quoting 1 Corinthians here.

And then he gives directions.

And then he gives directions. Repent for your sins in the past. Live a lively and steadfast faith in Christ our Savior. And then here it is. Amend your lives and be in perfect charity with all people. Perfect love with all people. Note that phrase. Amend your lives and be in perfect love with all people.

[19 : 07] Because I want to submit to you that that is actually getting very close to the heart of what Paul is on about in 1 Corinthians chapter 11. Let me explain. If you look at verses 27 and 29, you will realize they have the same sentence structure.

That's a fancy way of saying they are parallel statements. So verse 27, whoever eats and drinks in an unworthy manner, guilty. Verse 29, whoever eats and drinks without discerning the body, judgment.

So the beginning and the end is roughly the same. And in the middle, Paul uses two different phrases. In the first sentence, without, or in an unworthy manner. In the second sentence, without discerning the body.

So for Paul to partake of the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner means you are not discerning the body. Which raises the question, what is the body that Paul is talking about here?

Is it Christ's own physical body that was crucified to the cross? Or is it the church body, this community? We are one body that Christ gathers in his name.

[20 : 14] And although the two can't be separated, I think Paul ultimately is speaking about the church body here. Because notice how he says, eats and drinks, eats and drinks, eats and drinks, body and blood, body and blood, body and blood.

And then he goes singular, the body, discerning the body. I think he's talking about the church body here. So, when Paul says to examine yourself before eating and drinking, I think he is particularly interested in our attitude to one another when we come together.

He wants us to be asking the question before we gather together as a church, how am I relating to the people that I'm gathering together with? He wants us to be asking, how am I, am I viewing myself as belonging to them in the body of Christ and them as belonging to me?

And is God seeking to make me aware of any spiritual dynamics in my heart that are contributing to social dynamics in our church that are contrary to the good news about Jesus?

And that raises for me a really personal and pastoral question. What if you actually discern in your heart an improper attitude towards people that are within the church? What do you do then? I think Jesus' advice is really helpful here.

[21 : 35] If you're a Christian, generally listening to Jesus' advice is a helpful thing to do. And in his Sermon on the Mount, he anticipates this. He says there are going to be times when brothers and sisters within the same church are angry with one another and hurt each other.

What should you do? And he says in Matthew chapter 5, if you are offering your gift at the altar, i.e. if you are in the middle of worship, and there you remember as you are worshiping that you have a brother or sister who has something against you, you should stop your worship and go to your brother and sister and reconcile with them and then come back and resume your worship.

That's how significant that relationship is to Jesus. So, Paul is saying something that's actually quite simple.

He's saying, assess your attitude. Do a spiritual checkup before you partake of the Lord's Supper. And if anything unhealthy is revealed to you by the Lord in your heart, do the most simple and the most challenging of things and pursue relational healing and reconciliation.

So, what could this look like? I know what it's looked like for me from time to time is whenever I know that there might be a communion service coming up.

[22 : 52] So, here it's the last Sunday of every month. Is that right? We celebrate the Lord's Supper here as a community. And I want to commend this to you. Is maybe the day before, the hour before you do that, you could consider, am I not right with anybody in this body who I might be partaking of the Lord's Supper with tonight?

And then you just ask the Lord to reveal to you, is there anybody I'm not right with? And if it reveals anybody, then you pick up the phone, you give them a call, and you talk it through, and you ask for forgiveness, and you extend forgiveness.

You ask that question, are there any divisions in the body to which I am contributing? Are there people I've forgotten or I've failed to honor? Are there cliques that I've been a part of that have made others feel like they're second-class citizens?

Because I don't want to do anything that takes away from the centrality of Christ and the unity that he is seeking to bring as we receive of his grace at the Lord's Supper. And honestly, brothers and sisters, I had to do this this morning.

I was leading communion this morning, and last night I was convicted as I was working on this sermon. And so this morning, I had to go to somebody an hour before the service and be like, we've got to talk about something and get right with one another.

[24 : 07] And this leads to Paul's second pastoral direction. First, assess your attitude, and then adjust your action. Verse 33. So then, my brothers and sisters, 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. wait for one another. This is the language of patience and hospitality.

Other places in scripture, it's translated as to welcome or to receive, like welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you. And the implication is that hospitality requires patience, and patience is a form of hospitality.

It says, you're worth waiting for. You mean something to me. Your presence is significant. You're a key part of us. So, my mother growing up, she was, I had an Italian mother growing up, and so, the dinner table was very central to our life together.

But she had all these intensive rules about the dinner table. Like, I wasn't allowed to put my elbows on the table. I could only do my forearms. I wasn't allowed to use my fork and take a bite of food unless my knife was down, and it was on the appropriate side of the plate.

[25 : 26] And, you know, this stuff went on forever. So, in my younger years, it just felt like we were learning the rules for about a decade. But one thing I do remember that I think was really, really beautiful is that my mother would never allow us to touch an ounce of food until every single person was seated at the table.

She had this profound sense that we wait for people before we feast with them. It says something about the meaning of the meal, but it also says something about the significance of the relationships that we share as we partake of that meal together.

And I think Paul is pointing to something quite similar. He's saying the significance of your relationships as you share this meal together is very, very important.

How you partake of the Lord's Supper reveals if you really get the heart of the Christian faith that is proclaimed at the Lord's Supper. And it's that Jesus gave his life for you, and he wants you to give your life for one another.

So I think this is part of what makes sense of this tricky verse 19. If you look at verse 19 for me. He says, For there must be factions or divisions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized.

[26 : 46] I think Paul is saying that the genuineness of our Christian faith is in some way revealed in the way that we relate to one another in the church body.

So those are the two directives that Paul gives to those who partake of the Lord's Supper. He says, First assess, then act. This is not meant to be some anxiety-ridden rocket science.

He's saying discern the body and then do what builds up the body. Examine self, act for the other.

And notice, examine self and act for the other. It's a reversal of the pattern of the world.

The world examines others and acts for the self. But Jesus invites us to examine the self and act for the other. And this is part of the beauty and necessity and majesty of the gospel.

And this is where I want to end in the last minute or two with you. The beauty of the gospel is that the blood of Christ which is shed, which is something that we remember in the meal of the Lord's Supper, that alone has the power to dissolve the divisions that occur within us.

[27 : 49] The hymn, Nothing But the Blood of Jesus, gets the message right. If we stake our lives on anything other than Christ's sacrificial love for us, if we gain our sense of value and worth in relation to one another by anything other than Christ's sacrificial love for us, if we distinguish ourselves from one another and rank who is most important and who is less important in the body of Christ based on anything else other than Christ's sacrificial love for us, then we know that the cross of Christ has been sidelined in our life, and we have started to drift from the centrality of the Lord Jesus.

And Paul says that the only answer is to return again to the source of our salvation, the Lord Jesus himself. I think that's why the judgment theme is actually loomed so large in this passage.

It's because Paul is saying judgment comes where the cross has been sidelined, because on the cross is where Jesus took judgment on our behalf. So you walk away from the cross, and you starve yourself from grace, and you bring judgment on yourself.

You stay close to what Jesus did on the cross, and you feast on his grace and the judgment that he took for us, which means our freedom and our joy in relationship to him.

And that's why Paul points us to those deeply personal words. This is my body given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.

[29 : 20] This is the cup of the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me. Notice how personal it is.

Jesus and Jesus alone has the power to release us from the selfishness of our sin and to build us up into a community where there is no division, where we give greater honor to those that lack it, and where every member experiences the same care for one another.

Brothers and sisters, I'm really excited for the end of the month when we get to partake of the Lord's Supper together. It is a holy and weighty matter that we should not take lightly. And yet as we approach with due reverence and faithful hearts, we realize that we just receive grace upon grace upon grace upon grace.

We realize that's exactly what each one of us needs. Brothers and sisters, I speak this to you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.