

1 Corinthians Chapter 11 (B)

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[0 : 00] Let's have a look. How many people eat their meals sat in front of the telly?

Okay. Oh, some people put their hands up. Okay. All right. You didn't have to put your hands up. You didn't have to confess to that. I'm just about to say what an awful, terrible person you are to watch your telly. No, no, no. No, no, no.

You put your lunch on your lap or even your dinner on your lap. And, of course, when you sit at a table, there are certain matters of etiquette. There are certain rules, as it were, table rules that we are taught to have whenever we sit at the table.

So, you know, you don't lean across the table to grab something, especially in front of somebody else. That's one rule you mustn't do. You're not supposed to put your elbows on the table when you're there.

And other things as well, perhaps other rules that you were taught when you were younger about table manners. Well, the matter of table manners, you may be surprised to hear, is something that Paul deals with here.

[1 : 41] Not quite in the same way. Not in the same way as it how we eat our meals with our knife and fork in the right hands and so on. But certainly a matter of concern to him is the table manners of God's people in Corinth.

And they were atrocious. They had very bad table manners. Especially, of course, when it came to what we shall see is the matter of the Lord's table or the Lord's supper.

He says there at the very beginning in verse 17, In the following directives, I have no praise for you. We looked last week at the beginning of the chapter, verse 2. I praise you for remembering me.

But here, in this matter of their table manners, he has nothing good to say. Nothing complimentary to say about the way that they behave. Now, as we've seen, as we're thinking from chapter 11 onwards, Paul is dealing with the worship of the church.

The gathering together of God's people. He's already been dealing with lots of other problems in the church in Corinth. Problems which really make our hair stand on end. Real problems of division and argument and all sorts of immorality and terrible things, almost unspeakable things.

[2 : 52] But now he comes to the whole matter of when they gather together. When they gather like we're gathering together. And these next few chapters deal with that, as we thought last week. When he talked about the order that there is in the church.

The order that God has given for the church to function. And there's a disorder in the church. If you remember, if you were here last week, I said there's one verse particularly, which is of importance to us.

And in one sense, the key verse, I think, to these chapters. Chapters 11, 12, 13, and 14. And it's the key verse which is found in chapter 14, verse 33.

For God is not a God of disorder, but of peace. God is not a God of disorder, but of peace. And in the church in Corinth, there was disorder.

There was all sorts of falling out. All sorts of things that were happening. Not only in public, but in private as well. And so, one of the areas in where God's people gather together is, as Paul calls it here, the Lord's Supper.

[3 : 56] We may call it communion, call it the Lord's Table. But it's something which is very special to, unique to the church of Jesus Christ.

And even at such an important occasion, such a special occasion as sharing in the Lord's Supper, even there when the whole of the church is to be centering their thoughts upon Christ and his death upon the cross, even there there's division.

Even there they are out of sorts with one another. As Paul says this, verse 18. In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you.

To some extent, I believe it. Paul is actually responding to reports, to a letter that's been sent to him, outlining some of the problems that are in the church. And he's answering those problems. And one of them, the biggest one, is their divisions. We saw that right at the very start. They were divided over who was the best preacher. Some thought it was Paul, and some thought it was Apollos, and some thought it was Peter.

[4 : 58] And so they took sides. They were sort of sects, in one sense, in the church. They were this, and they were that. They were divided about how they should deal with one another and relate to one another.

There was a lack of love. All sorts of problems. And it was even there. It plagued every area of the life of the church. And I think that's very important for us to understand, that one of the greatest tools, as it were, one of the greatest weapons that Satan has, our enemy has, to make a church ineffective, and to make Christians ineffective, is for us to divide from one another.

By that, I don't mean that there shouldn't be different denominations. I don't mean that at all. But when we fall out with one another in a wrong way, when we are unforgiving to one another, when we are judgmental of one another, when we are harsh towards one another, and particularly, again, in the local church, that's a big problem.

And yet Paul says something quite strange here, doesn't he, in verse 19. He says, No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval. What's he talking about?

Why does he say that? He means this, that those divisions that are external often actually show the problem which is internal. How we behave is a reflection of the state of our relationship with God.

[6 : 22] If we are wrong in our relationships with one another, it's usually because we are firstly wrong in our relationships with the Lord. And the divisions that he's talking about, they're not simply matters of difference, of interpretation of Scripture.

They're not just nuances and small things. There's something more than this. Because those things don't prove whether God is with us.

As you may know if you've been to other churches, there may be those churches which have instruments, so I can put it that way, other than an organ and piano. That doesn't make them more in favor with God or less in favor with God.

Some churches have a different translation of the Scripture from the NIV that we have. That doesn't mean that they are more in favor with God or less in favor with God. Those are insignificant things, insignificant matters of upbringing or culture or tradition even as well.

They don't prove or disprove whether we are approved of by God. What shows whether we are approved of by God is this, that we are living as people who are following the Holy Spirit.

[7 : 28] That we are living as people who are showing the transformation and the change that God has worked in our lives. And that is seen particularly by what we do and our attitude to what we do.

Just look again at the very end of chapter 10. The end of chapter 10, verse 31. Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

That's the primary mark of whether we are approved of God. Whether we are doing the right thing. Are we doing it for the glory of God? Am I doing it because it's my tradition and it's what I want to do and it's how I like it?

Or is it because actually I believe that this is to the glory of God? Some of the behavior in the church here was so bad that instead of the church being blessed and knowing God's approval, His blessing upon them when they meet, rather they were being harmed.

There was damage being done through their worshiping and meeting together. Can you believe that? There in verse 17. I have no praise for you for your meetings do more harm than good.

[8 : 34] Isn't that a terrible thing? That when the Christians meet together, when people come to church on the Lord's Day on a Sunday, whenever it is, when they gather together, people are harmed instead of encouraged.

Harmed and damaged instead of blessed. Because there's division. Because there's the way that we speak to one another, act towards one another. Because there is a lack of forgiveness or love or so on.

Surely the very reason that Christ has given us the Lord's Supper is because He wants it to do us good. It's a blessing. It's an encouragement. It's a help to our faith.

That's the very reason He commanded His disciples, do this in remembrance of me. He instituted the Lord's Supper because it's one of those things that's for our encouragement and strengthening. So I want us to think for a few moments about the problems here in Corinth.

To think about how can we, not only when we gather in the Lord's Supper, that that's important and that's the focus here. But whenever we gather, how can we gather in such a way that we are blessed?

[9 : 38] That others are blessed? That we are encouraged? That we are helped? What can we learn, as it were, as an anti-lesson, a bad example from the Corinthians?

Well, if we want to be blessed when we meet together, particularly when we share in the Lord's Supper, but whenever we gather together, we need to get rid of certain things. And the very first thing we need to get rid of is selfishness.

Selfishness. Look at the problem there in verse 20. What's going on here?

Well, in the church in Corinth, it seems to be the practice in the early church, and it's still a practice in some churches as well, is that the people of God would meet together, have a meal together, eat together, and then following on from that, almost an extension of their fellowship in food would be a fellowship around the Lord's Table.

A bit like the lunch we had today, a fellowship lunch today, where we shared together and ate together, following on from our worship. The celebration of communion would follow such a meal.

[10 : 56] It was part of their meeting together. And so it seems that just a bit like our own fellowship lunches, everybody would bring a bit to share. Everybody would bring a contribution for the meal, that they would share with others.

And of course, that would be according to what they could afford, what they could manage to bring. We see there that some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. They brought the food, but they basically just ate it to themselves and didn't share with anybody.

There's another difference as well. Not only was it that some could bring a lot because they were rich, but there were those, and those who were a bit poor, couldn't bring much.

But also, there was different times. They didn't all come together exactly at the same time because it wasn't easy for them all to do that, especially if you were a slave. Many of the Christians in the first century, many in Corinth, no doubt as well, were slaves, which is why when you get to some of the apostles' teaching in Ephesians and Colossians, you'll get indirectly giving teaching to those who are slaves and to the masters of slaves as well.

They couldn't get away. They couldn't say, oh yes, I'll definitely be there at 11 o'clock in the morning because they had duties to perform. They didn't just have a sort of like a work nine to five schedule. As long as their master wanted them to be there and working, they had to be there.

[12 : 17] So they could just only come when they were released and free to come. And so what happened is this. There were some who were arriving early, the better off members of the church. They don't have the duties and responsibilities, perhaps of a slave.

They've got food and they're getting a bit hungry. And so they decide just to eat the food and drink the wine. But what was happening? What was the result? Here's what we read, verse 21.

As a result, one remains hungry and another gets drunk. Not only was it when the slaves came, when the poorer people came, when those came along, all the food had been scoffed, but also half the congregation were inebriated.

They were drunk. They'd drunk all the wine as well. What a chaotic situation. It's a display of gluttony, isn't it? Overindulgence. A lack of love for the other believers in the church.

As Paul says there, don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Verse 22. Here's particularly the rub. Do you despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing? They had no love for, no care for the other believers.

[13 : 29] They treated them in a despicable way. They said, you despise them. You're humiliating your fellow believers, your brothers and sisters in Christ. Now, it's very unlikely when we share in the Lord's Supper or even when we share in a fellowship meal together, it's unlikely that we will have a problem of everybody eating all the food.

We have to be careful occasionally that those who go front don't pile their plates too high. But we're talking about communion when we just have a small piece of bread and we have a small cup of

grape juice.

It's unlikely that's going to be a problem that when the plate comes around, somebody will grab a handful of it and eat it all and take all the cups. Of course, that's not going to happen. But what's under the surface?

What was it that the Corinthians lacked? They lacked love for one another. What is it that we need most of all when we share together in worship, when we share together in the Lord's Supper, is that we need love?

The blessing of God falls with His love. Remember that wonderful psalm? We read it from time to time. It's Psalm 133. How good and how pleasing it is when brothers and sisters dwell together in unity.

[14 : 40] And the very end of that small, as it were, psalm ends with, there the Lord bestows His blessing, even life forevermore. There's something particularly special.

There's something particularly that God delights in when He sees His people together of one heart and mind and love. There's something that He counts particularly important because it's an expression of the unity that we have in Christ.

We are one in Christ. That cannot be removed, that spiritual union, that bond which has brought us into, a living relation with Christ as branches to a vine. That's something real.

But the reality which is inward and spiritual must be seen in the reality of outward. And that's where God commands His blessing, where there is love.

Surely that's something that's going to come out. Surely why do we get to chapter 13, right in the middle of this passage all about worship, where Paul lays down the importance, the imperative of love for one another and the reality of love.

[15 : 43] Well, how does that impact us? What does that mean for us? Surely it means this, dear friends, that if we come to worship and particularly to the Lord's Supper and we come with unforgiveness to other brothers or sisters in the church, we cannot expect God to bless us.

We cannot. How on earth can God bless us when we are harboring in our hearts unforgiveness, bitterness, resentment? Can't do it, can he?

It just grieves the Spirit of God. It goes against everything that Christ taught, everything that Christ did for us on the cross to remove the barriers, to remove and to break down and to restore and to reconcile.

If we're coming, dear friends, and we have had a wrong attitude towards somebody else in the church and it may be that they've just said something or they've done something.

You may even say, well, I'm justified in being upset with them because they were insensitive and they were thoughtless or they acted sinfully. That isn't the point, if I can put it this way. Jesus does not say to us and the Scriptures do not say to us, only forgive the things that aren't painful or only forgive the things when people say they're sorry.

[17 : 02] We're to be forgiving, accepting, loving, whatever the other person... See, the thing is this, my relationship with the Lord is the thing that matters, isn't it?

Yes, my relationship with one another, but I'm not answerable ultimately for how you act towards God. I'm not ultimately answerable for your sin, but I'm answerable for mine.

And if I have unforgiveness, if I have a wrong attitude, if I have a condescending or a judgmental attitude or whatever it may be to a brother and sister in Christ and I have not put that right in my own heart, then I cannot expect the Lord to bless.

That's why a little later on, as we'll come, we see that Paul urges this important matter of self-examination in relationship to our place in the body of Christ.

Verses 28 and 29. Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ, eat and drink judgment on themselves.

[18 : 08] He's talking about there our relationship in the church. If we don't discern and understand that we are part of the body of Christ and that has responsibilities and duties of love towards others, then we will not be eating with the right attitude or heart and we will not receive the blessing.

We've got to come to the table, yes, as individuals on the basis of our own faith, but we come as one body united in love, united in Christ. The second thing that we need to recognize and we need to see here is that we need to get rid of selfishness, but we also need to see the symbolism.

We need to recognize the symbolism of what's taking place in communion. Verses 23 to 26. These are the very familiar words that we know and have heard many times where Paul quotes from the Lord Jesus and from the Last Supper, as we call it, that meal that he ate with his disciples on the night before his death.

That's why Paul says here, I received from the Lord. It's not Paul saying, this is my idea about how you should do communion. This is how I think it should be. He's saying, no, I received from the Lord.

This is what I know Christ said and this is what I know Christ wants us to do because it's his will, not mine. Not his ideas, not his thoughts, but Christ.

[19 : 36] We need to recognize the symbolism, the meaning that's behind the bread and the wine. Again, we can't receive any good from them simply by just eating and drinking. That does us no spiritual good whatsoever to be thoughtless in one sense, to not conceive of and understand and grasp what the bread and the wine mean and what we're actually partaking in and sharing in.

Paul says here twice that this is a remembrance that Jesus speaks about in verse 24. This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me. Verse 25, this cup is the new covenant of my blood.

Do this whenever you drink it in remembrance of me. Our minds are to be caused to be active, as it were, to remember, to think upon, to meditate upon, to focus upon those events in the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, his person as well as his action.

And so we have the bread. First of all, this is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me. That's exactly the words that Jesus spoke and that Luke quotes in Luke chapter 22.

We just need to be clear. I know it's clear to all of us but we need to recognize again that Paul is not saying and Jesus is not saying this bread has taken on human flesh.

[20 : 59] It's been changed in some mysterious or magical way. This bread has become the very flesh and body of Jesus. That's not what he's saying. Never has been what he said.

Never meant that in any way. We're not to imagine somewhere we're eating Jesus. One of the things that the first century Christians were accused of was cannibalism because they spoke about eating the body of Christ and of course the poor Romans didn't understand that whatsoever.

They said these Christians are cannibals. They're eating flesh and drinking blood. No, that's not the case whatsoever. The body of our Lord Jesus Christ first of all of course is in heaven.

It's not on earth. It's not of bread. The body of our Lord Jesus Christ though it's different from ours is a resurrection body, a glorified body but it's still a physical body in that sense in heaven.

It's not here. It's not it doesn't become something else. It belongs to him and is his. But Jesus does talk about doesn't he about feeding on his body.

[22 : 04] In John and chapter 6 you might want to look there for a moment and we're going to flick through there a little bit because there Jesus goes to some length to talk about the meaning of feeding upon him and of drinking eating his flesh and drinking his blood which sounds extremely cannibalistic but isn't.

Jesus explains exactly what he means by that in verses 47 and 48. he says very truly I tell you the one who believes has eternal life.

I am the bread of life. Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness yet they died but here is the bread that comes down from heaven which anyone may eat and not die. What has Jesus just said? He's made it clear that anyone who believes in me it's faith by faith we feed upon Christ. when we take that bread what we're doing is by faith saying Lord Jesus you are the one who provides for me all the sustenance that I need for my soul.

When we're taking of that bread we're saying you are the one who gives to me everything that I need you're the one who sustains me you're the one who strengthens me just as bread strengthens me you are my strength. Especially again of course when we take that bread we're saying Lord Jesus you died and your body was broken for me in my place you suffered the death that I deserve the judgment I deserve.

[23 : 33] We need to recognize that when we're taking that bread it's not a piece of bread it doesn't do anything for us unless our faith is exercised unless we are actively in our minds in our hearts saying Lord Jesus I thank you thank you thank you that you give to me and provide for me through your death all that I need.

And then of course the wine that is spoken of well Jesus speaks about his own blood doesn't he there verse 54 whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life and I will raise them up at the last day for my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in them just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father so the one who feeds on me will live because of me he's talking again clearly about spiritual life isn't he he's not talking about physical life because he's relating the relationship he has with the Father which is that union that bond that spiritual relationship is like our spiritual relationship with Christ there is something incredible that we can't comprehend about the relationship between the Father and the Son Jesus says I live because of the Father there's a there's a an interdependency within the Trinity

God the Father God the Son God the Spirit each person is completely and totally divine in nature and yet somehow there is a relationship within them which is I can't think of the special word I need but basically they depend upon rely upon and receive from one another I was going to say symbiotic but probably that's not the right word there's there is something there that reflects the relationship the Christian has with Christ not that he depends upon us but that we depend upon him and that everything that is his is ours and so again the drinking of the blood if we can put it that way the drinking of the cup reminds us that again the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ was shed to bring forgiveness for us with God and so when Paul writes as he does in 1 Corinthians 11 he talks about the new covenant in his blood or Jesus the new covenant in my blood particularly Luke talks about that a new covenant it's an agreement it's a binding agreement it's a it's it's the closest thing we have to it in this world is marriage where two people promise themselves to one another and when Jesus speaks about the new covenant he's speaking about the better covenant the best covenant he's speaking about how in one sense his coming into the world is the bringing together of all the covenants of the Old Testament into their complete into their completion into their proper place so all the promises and blessings in those covenants were partial but they find their fulfillment in him and in his life and death upon the cross so when we drink of the cup we are again by faith thanking God for the wonderful provisions the wonderful cleansing from our sins the wonderful blessings that come to us directly from Christ because of his sacrifice in our place and we are declaring something so very important we are declaring that it is all of Christ and none of ourselves in taking the cup we are recognizing that there is no way for us to cleanse ourselves of our sin there is no way for us to make ourselves right with God our faith is totally resting upon the finished completed perfect work of Jesus for us now why is it that we need to remember these things because we forget them so easily and that's why we read there don't we in verse 26 whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes we are to keep on doing this because we keep on forgetting we keep on losing sight of we keep on missing the point and the focus of Christ and we need to keep on being refocused again to the person of Jesus and all that he means to us and all that he's done for us and all that we are in him and the death of Christ is the key we rejoice in the birth of our Lord

Jesus Christ that as the son of God he became incarnate he became a human being and lived amongst us we rejoice and we thank God for his word the truth that he has expanded in revealing the very person of God to us in his life in his miracles in his teaching but it's in the cross of Jesus in the cross of Jesus that the power of sin is broken in our lives and we are reconciled to God it's only in the cross of Jesus that there is a way of life if we only have Jesus as the incarnate God if we only have Jesus as the great miracle worker and the revelation of God and we don't have him as the atoning sacrifice for our sins then we have no salvation and that's why we proclaim his death that's why Paul could say when he writes earlier on we looked at that in 1 Corinthians you know this is it seems foolishness to the Gentiles it's a stumbling block to the Jews that God should come and die for us but for me he says it's the power of God unto salvation it's the essence if we stop remembering the cross and stop preaching the cross and stop proclaiming and celebrating the cross then we stop being Christians and we stop being a church so we're to see that there is no place for selfishness when we worship together we're to see there is symbolism particularly when we come to the Lord's table but also we're to see that there is seriousness seriousness about what's going on clearly the people who were here were not serious they just saw it as a party they just saw it as a place to bring their food get drunk with their mates and let their hair down their act of selfishness their lack of understanding about the importance of recognizing the body of Christ and the cross showed that they were eating it in unworthy manner so verse 27 so then whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body

and blood of the Lord what a serious thing serious is what Paul is saying this is not to be taken lightly it's not to be treated without respect you can't just come along to it as you would to any other meal you can't even come together as believers as if this is just like any other gathering of people in the boating club or the bowls club or whatever it may be and he says it's serious in this way because if we come to the Lord's table in the wrong way if we come to communion and I believe as well it's fair to say if we come to worship and gather as God's people and our hearts are not right with him and we do not understand what we are about as we should do then instead of us receiving blessing

Paul says this we receive judgment that's how serious God takes it how serious we ought to take it ourselves we are sinning against the Lord and so he says there in verse 29 for those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves and the repercussions he says are very tangible and real for this reason he says verse 30 that's why some among you are weak and ill a number of you have fallen asleep when he means fallen asleep it doesn't mean that the minister was so boring that you nodded off he means you've died why can you get more serious than life and death and Paul says the reason that some of you died and the reason some of you were sick and the reason some of you are ill is this because God is disciplining you and judging you and bringing you to a place of seeing just how serious your sin is that's not a laughing matter is it it's a serious matter when we come into the presence of

[31 : 58] God to become yes with joy and thanksgiving and delight for all that he's done for us and all that Christ has done for us but we come seriously I am meeting with and I am in the presence of the almighty God who is the God to whom I must give an account of when I die who is the God who judges sin and does not simply turn a blind eye to it or brush it under the carpets so let's bring us to a conclusion since it is so serious to God since this matter is a matter of judgment or blessing of life or death how should we approach the Lord's table and how should we approach worship and I think the two come together what does he say verse 28 everyone ought to examine themselves everyone ought to examine themselves what are we looking for if you're examining if you're searching for something you're looking you know what you're looking for if you lost your keys around the house we're examining we're searching to find that one thing so what are we looking for before we come into the presence of God and before we come particularly to the

Lord's table we need to ask ourselves examine ourselves am I a true believer am I really someone who is born again of the spirit of God am I someone who really believes Jesus took my sin at the cross and cleansed me with his own precious blood am I someone whose faith rests upon solely the work of Jesus or am I hoping that God will accept me because I've been a good boy or a good girl this week or because I've read my Bible or said my prayers are we examining ourselves and have we come to God for forgiveness this week when I come to the table am I coming confessing my sin do I know that I need forgiveness am I coming knowing that in my life my desire is to glorify God am I coming having walked with him yes I fail and I fall but I want to walk rightly with him and rightly with my fellow believers or do I examine myself and I see there there's that little bit of unforgiveness that bit of resentment and it's there and I've not dealt with it it's the time to examine ourselves but it's the time then to judge ourselves

Paul says verse 31 if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves we would not come under such judgment in other words he says if we judged ourselves we wouldn't come under judgment judging yourself is to pass sentence if I put it that way if you examine yourself and found something is wrong and wanting then the judgment is that you do something about it so if I need to repent of sin I need to repent if I need to take action and determine to forgive that brother or sister I need to do that if there's something that I've left undone I need to put that right in one sense I would say to you sometimes dear friends it's better not to take communion if we know and the Holy Spirit has shown to us there's something that we haven't sorted out it's better to let it pass and to get that matter sorted out before we come to the table is there a determination that though I've fallen and failed in this way or that

Lord you will help me not to do it again I don't want to sin again I don't want to fail again I don't want to keep getting this wrong make that determination in my heart to seek Christ in such a way that my life does not dishonor him wouldn't have been lovely if we could have been there and heard when Paul says when I come I'll give further instruction wonder what else he would have said we don't need to know because the Lord hasn't given that to us what he's given to us is so clear and so good and for our blessing and for our help that we'd be fools to ignore it even though we aren't coming to

the communion table now let's just take a few moments to examine ourselves before the light of what God's word and to judge ourselves and respond to his word in prayer let's do that close with the words of the grace the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore Amen Amen