

1 Corinthians 11 v 17 - 34

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[0 : 00] at verse 17. This is breaking into Paul as he's giving extended teaching on the whole matter of how we meet together and worship together as Christians. And so we read God's Word.

In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. 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. No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval. When you come together it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, for as you eat each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. Don't you have homes 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 praise you for this?

Certainly not. For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you. The Lord Jesus on the night in which he was betrayed took bread. 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 the Lord's death until he comes. Therefore 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. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we judged ourselves we would not come under judgment.

When we are judged by the Lord we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world. So then my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other. If anyone is hungry he should eat at home so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment. And when I come I will give further instructions. And we trust and know that the Lord has something to say to us from his word this morning. Well let's sing together as we take up our offering. It's in the little purple book 142 142.

142.

[2 : 59] 142. Tranyimi cause break coils back covers D começ to general 43 ajust back five later finger affect shows him to Well now cuts so bodies Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Put your elbows on the table, and don't stretch across the table to reach for something that you want.

[5 : 54] Do sit up straight, and use your knife and fork in the right hands. all those table manners. I wonder if all these years later we still follow those rules every day when we sit down, some of us unthinkingly. Perhaps some of us don't and only perhaps when we go out for a meal in a nice restaurant or on a special occasion do we sort of particularly try to remember our table manners. Well there's no more special occasion in the life of a Christian than to eat at the Lord's table or the Lord's Supper or communion as we variously call it. And Jesus gave two celebrations to his church, two important events concerning how we are to practice our Christian life. Two things, one of course is baptism with water, something that happens just once to us during our lifetime and the other is communion, the Lord's Supper which we to enjoy more often, regularly, frequently in that sense. Some Christians call these two events sacraments, some call them ordinances and so on. And so Christ commanded us to practice these two celebrations, baptism and the Lord's Supper and he ordered us to do that because they're for our good, they're for our blessing, they're for our encouragement, they're for our help.

When someone is baptised, it is a picture of being cleansed from sin, a reminder of the wonderful work that Jesus has done on the cross for us and promises of God to wash and cleanse our souls from sin. Communion reminds us particularly of the price that Jesus paid for that salvation and forgiveness and the blessings that we have through faith in him. Now when we come to this letter to the church at Corinth, if you know the letter and you've read it then you'll know that really the majority of the letter is made up of Paul correcting misunderstandings and mispractices amongst the Christians there.

They did things badly and one of the things they did badly was the communion. So much so that Paul says there in verse 17 which we read, In the following directives, I have no praise for you for your meetings, that's your communion services, the Lord's Supper, do more harm than good. So when the church met together to have what we're doing now in one sense, instead of it being a blessing, instead of it being good, which is what Jesus intended, the people were being harmed. They were being discouraged. They were being unhelpful in the way that they went around doing it. And so what I want us to do is, because as I said this is something we do infrequently, I want us to spend just a few moments thinking about what Paul teaches here about how we can be blessed as we take this communion service today. What is it that God wants us to have? What is he wants us to enjoy? And how we can receive the greatest blessing from it.

And so in one sense, Paul lays out for us the table manners of coming to the Lord's Supper, the do's and the don'ts of how we can eat rightly and properly and ultimately with blessing from this table. The first don't really, the first table manner which we find that the Corinthians were not practicing, but we must practice this, don't be selfish. Don't be selfish.

Look at verse 21. For as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. Now in the church in Corinth, it seems very clearly that the practice of the Lord's Supper was preceded by a fellowship meal. We're going to have a fellowship meal after we've had communion, but they had a fellowship meal before. And in one sense, the communion part of it sort of proceeded out of that, was part of that meal really almost at the end.

[10 : 11] And it was an integral part of their meeting together and eating together was that they would ultimately remember the Lord Jesus Christ and celebrate his death on the cross. But what would happen is that people would bring their own food, a bit like today as well, as we have the fellowship lunch, and according to what they could afford. Some were very, very poor and were able to bring virtually nothing. Some were well off and affluent, able to bring more and so on. But also each person arrived at a different time in the meal. It wasn't so much of a set time. People had difficulty getting there, especially slaves. And there were many slaves in the Roman world of Corinth. For them, they couldn't just have a day off in the week. They had to fulfill their duties to their masters or mistresses. And only when they had fulfilled all those duties, then were they given leave, perhaps to spend some time to themselves coming to fellowship. And so what was happening was this.

There were those who were arriving early, usually the people who had money, people who were affluent, the free men and women. And rather than waiting for the slaves and others to arrive who were perhaps less well off, they began eating all the food and drinking all the drink. And so by the time that those who were poorer, those who were the slaves and those who were without got there, they found not only that the food was all gone, but also that some of the people were worse than were for wine. We see that there in verse 21. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. Each goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? So you see this problem. It was a display of gluttony, of greed, of overindulgence, which showed a real lack of love for the rest of the church body. They were acting selfishly.

They were despising and humiliating their fellow believers. Now, I think it's highly unlikely that when we share in communion in a little while together, that we shall have the problem of somebody eating all the bread and a few people drinking all the grape juice. That's not going to happen.

I don't know that's why we have individual cups to make sure nobody drinks it all down. I'm not sure if that's the reason. It may be hygienic reasons instead. But if we would be blessed as we come to the table, we need to bear in mind this principle. And the principle is that we exercise what the Corinthians did not exercise, and that is love for one another. They were selfish.

And they came individually and individualistically to the table. And we need to come corporately. We need to recognize we come as a body of believers with a genuine love for one another. You see, when we take communion like this, we are actually expressing our unity as a church family, as belonging together in Christ. Paul had made this point a little earlier in the previous chapter, in chapter 10. If you look there, when he speaks about these things in verse 19.

[13 : 24] Verse 19 of chapter 10 is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks, a sharing or a participation in the blood of Christ. It's not the bread that we break, a participation, a sharing in the body of Christ. Because there is one loaf, we who are many are one body. So we're displaying and expressing our unity, our oneness as Christians together. That's why it's so imperative, as we see as we go on, that we are indeed Christians together in Christ when we share in the table. It's not just an individualistic thing. It's not just about what I want or whether I think I should take it, but whether we belong together and have a love for one another.

And therefore we need to take that to another level as well. Loving one another must mean that when we come to the table that there is forgiveness towards one another. Real forgiveness. If we come to this table and we eat and we have a wrong attitude towards a brother or sister in Christ, then we're coming with the spirit of Corinthians. We come and we have not a genuine concern for one another and love for one another. If we aren't willing to receive our brothers and sisters in Christ as those who belong with us, then we're moving in that territory towards the attitude of the church in Corinth.

That's why a little later Paul urges self-examination with respect to the body of Christ. There in chapter 11, 28 and 29, a man ought to examine himself before he eats the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord. Now that's not just in that sense the body of Christ on the cross, but the body of the Lord spoken in this context is the church, the local church, without recognizing that we are part of the local church, that we are one with one another. Then Paul warns against that and that we must examine one another.

So, do we love one another? Yes, it's imperfect. Have we said things to one another that we should have apologized for? Have we got wrong attitudes to one another in this local church that we have not put right? Have people said things and we haven't forgiven them? Dear friends, we can't afford to come to the table without that real love, with that selfishness in place, then we shall miss out on the blessing. There's no blessing to be had. We come with a wrong attitude towards one another. So, here we have, do not be selfish. The second thing that's very important for us to do when we come to the Lord's table, the second manner in one sense is this, we do need to remember the symbolism. Do need to remember the symbolism. Remember Jesus said, this is my body, do this in remembrance of me. Verses 23 and 26, we have in chapter 11, 1 Corinthians here, for I received from the Lord while I also passed to you. The Lord Jesus on the night he was betrayed took bread and he given thanks broke it and so on.

Now, these words are very familiar to us, aren't they? Because we repeat them and mention them almost every time that we have communion together. They are vital words. They're the very words of Jesus himself. If you go back to the gospel writers, you'll find in Matthew, Mark and Luke particularly, Jesus using that very language. We did it with the children from Luke 22, do this in remembrance of me.

[16 : 58] These are Jesus's words to his disciples on the night before his death. They're not Paul's words. It's not Paul laying down some tradition, as it were. He says, I receive them from the Lord.

They have authority. They matter because Jesus spoke them. And if Jesus spoke them, when we must, must pay attention, they are all the more precious to us. And what does Jesus tell us?

He tells us that we are to remember the symbolism of what's going on here. We are to see through the bread and the wine and see really what they point to, signposts. They point, of course, to him.

They point, of course, to his life and his death upon the cross for us. And if we see them as anything else than that, then we fail to receive the blessing that is in store for us. They are to cause us to cast our minds back, to remember the events of the life of the Lord Jesus Christ, to think again upon him. And so we have two symbols, don't we? Two simple symbols, bread and wine. Bread, Jesus says, is a reminder of his body. This is my body which is for you. Jesus does not want us to think that this bread, in some mystical way, is his body. It doesn't, it isn't changed into his flesh, as some people think. It isn't in any way any different from the bread that you buy and was bought at the shop yesterday. But it's a picture, it's a symbol of his body to remind us that we are those who feed upon him. Jesus is indeed the one who is the bread of life. He tells us that in John in chapter 6, and he explains what it means to eat the bread, or to eat of his flesh. He says this in John chapter 6, verse 48, I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life.

And then goes on to say, I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. So eating is actually believing. When we eat the bread, we're not eating Jesus. His body is in heaven. He is risen from the dead. His glorified body is there. This is not his body in any way. It never can be, never could be. But when we feed upon the bread, what we're doing is saying this, I am feeding on you, Lord Jesus. I am exercising faith in you, Lord Jesus. I'm trusting you, Lord Jesus, as the one who meets all my needs, who provides for the basic needs of my life. The one who feeds my soul, and I'm acknowledging that for you to give me life everlasting, it meant your death, your physical suffering and death in my place upon the cross. It's a symbol of the bread. It's to us the symbol of Jesus and his body broken for us to feed us with life. And then there's the cup.

[20 : 05] The cup which Jesus said, this is the cup of the new covenant in my blood. Wine again reminds us of his death in our place, so that we might be forgiven and right with God. Again, back in John 6, Jesus spoke about drinking his blood. Again, an act of faith. The cup does not become his blood. The grape juice that is there is still just ordinary grape juice. But Jesus is pointing us to something wonderful that has happened, something glorious that has taken place in his life and particularly in his death. For he said, this is the cup of the new covenant in my blood. The new covenant is the complete covenant. The Bible uses the word covenant to mean a binding agreement of promises made between God and certain individuals and certain people as well. And when Jesus says the new covenant, he means the perfect, the better, the best, the one that brings all the covenants of the Bible together, brings them to fulfillment, all the promises earlier on in the Old Testament. Here's Hebrews in chapter 9, where, again, the apostle teaches us this truth. 9.15, for this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant. So when we drink the blood, sorry, when we drink the cup, we are by faith thanking God for that wonderful cleansing that Jesus has brought about by his death for us. Cleansing from sin and bringing us into this wonderful covenant relationship with God, this friendship, this union with God that can never be broken. When we drink the cup, we're acknowledging that this is all of Jesus' doing and not of our own. We're acknowledging that it's by faith alone that we can be right with God, not by our works, not by our deeds, by drinking and eating of this.

We aren't somehow earning God's favor or earning his blessing. We're simply acknowledging what Jesus has done for us. And we're to keep on doing that, the Bible tells us, until Jesus comes again, when we shall be fully free from all of our sins, when we shall fully enter into all the blessings. Here at the end, verse 26, Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 11, whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death. You're declaring what Jesus has done for you until he comes. We won't share communion when we're in heaven. We won't need to because we won't need, we won't be forgetful. So we won't need reminding. But Jesus has given us for now, up until that time when he comes again, to remind us, to remind us with blessing and joy of all that he has done for us in the cross. And so finally, dear friends, when we think about these do's and don'ts, we are to not be selfish. We are to be remembering of the symbolism. But thirdly and finally, we are also to be serious when we come to the communion table.

There's a seriousness about what we're doing. This is not a flippant thing. This is not just a sort of a religious ritual that we're doing. It is something of great and deep seriousness. By acting as they did with selfishness, with a lack of understanding about what they were about, the Corinthian Christians treated communion in an unworthy way. Verse 27, please read there, verse of chapter 11, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and the blood of the Lord. To eat communion with a wrong attitude, with a wrong heart, without saving faith in Jesus, is to sin against the Lord. It's that serious. It's a grievous thing.

It's something that God counts and does not treat lightly. Sin is not something that he counts as unimportant. If we take communion in this way, then we are sinning, treating it without the respect and the seriousness it deserves. But to treat communion in the way that God has commanded us to means that we should cure the blessing, the blessing that Jesus intended for us through it.

But if we eat it wrongly, we're told that this sin ends in judgment. Isn't it strange? Isn't it perhaps difficult for us to comprehend? But that's exactly what we read here, isn't it? Repercussions of eating communion in a wrong heart and a wrong way, without love towards one another, without recognizing what Jesus has done for us in the cross, means judgment.

[25 : 10] Here's Paul. For anyone who eats and drinks, verse 29, without recognizing the body of the Lord, eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and sick and a number of you have fallen asleep.

What does he mean? He means simply this, that God acted with judgment against those people who treated communion in a frivolous, foolish way. Some were sick, some even died. How did they die?

God's hand. Now that's serious, isn't it? You see, we can't play with God. We can't treat him as if he's somehow impotent or powerless to act, or as if he doesn't care. This is how many people not just treat communion, but the whole of life. Somehow God isn't really that important. It doesn't really matter how I behave and act. God doesn't really see. If he does see, he doesn't really care. But he does care and he does act and he does take sin seriously. And your idea, friends, must recognize that.

This is the wonder of the cross. This is the wonder of communion. This is the wonder of what we're about. Remembering that God has made a way of forgiveness so that he does not treat us as our sins deserve.

As Paul goes on to say, God is disciplining us out of love. Disciplining us so that we might receive blessing instead of condemnation. That we might receive joy instead of judgment. We might receive life instead of death. In a few moments we're going to sing a hymn together as we prepare to come to this communion table. But before we do that, I want us to do two things. To do the two things that we're commanded to do here by Paul and ultimately by the Lord Jesus. One is to examine ourselves and then to judge ourselves as Paul does so. And we're going to take a few moments to do that in quietness. Just as we enter into that, it's the way that we are to approach communion every time. Whenever we come to it, we're to approach it in this way. First of all, examine ourselves. A man ought to examine himself.

[27 : 24] So what are we looking for? When you examine something, you're looking for something. Looking for fault or looking for some problem. Well, the first thing we're looking for is this. Am I a true believer in the Lord Jesus Christ? Can I honestly say when I take of this bread and wine, I really have put my faith in Jesus to take away my sins and to make me right with God. Have I asked for his forgiveness for my sin? Am I walking rightly with God day by day, seeking to put him first in my life? Ultimately, in one sense, in taking of the communion, I'm saying that Jesus has died for me and I have died to the world for him. Have I forgiven that person who has upset me? Am I right with my fellow Christians in this fellowship? So let's just take a few moments in the quietness of our hearts, allow the Holy Spirit to examine us on these matters and answer honestly before him.

Search us, O Lord, we pray. Examine our hearts and lives, not that we might beat ourselves up with condemnation, but rather we might look to you, the Savior of sinners. Search into those very dark recesses, those places, Lord, which we don't allow the light to shine. Shine and show us, Lord, just who we are and what we're like. That selfishness, that unforgiveness, that lack of love. O Lord, those things that really disgust us about ourselves. Again, not that we might just feel bad, that we might bring them to you for cleansing and forgiveness. We thank you that in Jesus there is, for every sinner, forgiveness as we put our faith and trust in you.

Secondly, I want us to judge ourselves as well. What do we mean by that? Well, Paul says here, if we judged ourselves, verse 31, we would not come under judgment. When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned of the world. We are to pass judgment on ourselves. In other words, we're to take action, to pass judgment. It's to do something.

So we've examined ourselves and now that there is action required. Is there repentance? If the Holy Spirit has shown us areas of sin in our lives, have we repented of those sins? Truly, genuinely, said, Lord, only forgive me, but Lord, turn me away from those things. I may not live for them anymore.

My life may be different. That's what repentance is, not just feeling sorry or bad about yourself. But also, we need to act as well. Is there a brother or sister in Christ I need to be reconciled with?

[30 : 15] Somebody I need to put things right with? Well, decide to do that and act upon it. Is there a sin in my life which dishonours Christ, a habit and an action which I've allowed to go on and I haven't dealt with and with Christ's help determined to deal with it, to put it to death, to give it no room?

Judgment needs action. And therefore, it means as well, dear friends, if there are those of us here this morning and we can say, I'm not a Christian, I haven't trusted in Jesus, I wouldn't be taking that bread and wine with real faith, but only perhaps to please somebody or because I think it's going to be the right thing to do, then don't take that bread and wine. Don't take it. Let it pass.

Or if you feel more at ease, as we sing in a few moments, please feel free just to slip out and go downstairs. We'll join you in a little while. But act. Don't let things just go. Don't just let things slide. And if the Lord has been speaking with you as he has with me this morning, dear friends, please. He's doing that for your blessing, for your good, for your joy, for your salvation. And as we come to the table, let's come with that faith that rejoices and receives of the life of God.

Let's sing together now. As we sing as...