

A HEALTHY MEAL**1 Corinthians 11:17-34**

INTRO: The first Sunday of October every year is World Communion Sunday. We observe it every year, but this year, of all years, is a good time to make sure we do not miss the significance of what communion is. Even more to the point, since we've been studying 1 Corinthians now for most of 3 months, it's helpful to study what Paul had to say to the Corinthian church about the Lord's Supper – and I get to do that and remain in my series entitled BEING THE CHURCH IN CHALLENGING TIMES. In order to do that however, I need to jump ahead in the letter to Chapter 11 from where I was two weeks ago in 1 Corinthians 6. As I said at that time, I will pick up where I left off next Sunday – but for today, here is our text:

(Read 1 Corinthians 11:17-34)

I miss Dinner Church. I think most of us do. The food is always wonderful. ABC really knows how to do potluck and we have perfected it with our Wednesday evening meals combined with LifeGroup meetings. But, it's not just the food. It's the fellowship that goes with it. We love seeing one another and gathering around the table fellowshiping together. It never gets old and we're particularly good at it. That's why we miss it so badly as this cruel global pandemic has preempted it and prevented us from gathering; at least in that way.

Paul has had sharp words for the Corinthians all the way through his letter and he doesn't let up here. It's appropriate, in modern American thinking, that Paul's words about communion come in chapter 11 of his letter, since, Chapter 11 is a type of bankruptcy used that involves a reorganization of a debtor's business affairs, debts, and assets, and for that reason is known as "reorganization" bankruptcy. In the U.S. bankruptcy code 11, corporations generally file Chapter 11 if they require time to restructure their debts, and that's where the term comes from. The Corinthian Church most definitely needed a reorganization of their practice of communion because it was very bankrupt. The words he begins with in verse 17 are "*I have no praise for you.*" and then as he continues it's obvious that the phrase is an amazing understatement. Paul blasts them for making a holy and sacred remembrance into a sacrilegious free-for-all. What should be a healthy meal has become one worthy of indigestion, if not fatal as food poison.

Now, ABC does not practice such debauchery at communion. Our practice of the Lord's Supper (which, by the way, is another name for Holy Communion) is always carried out with the gravity it deserves. Nevertheless, since we are in this study, and today is World Communion Sunday, AND since we have not had Communion since the Sunday before the Quarantine shutdown, this is a very timely teachable moment to examine what communion is even as we look at what Paul said it was not. Here is what we see here. . .

Communion is a gathering meant for good

- This seems like a no-brainer, but crazy as it seems, it wasn't for the Corinthians. One could say they didn't know any better. We've heard all along in our study of this letter, that the Corinthians had been saved out of an extremely corrupt culture. They were a lot better than they have been, right? Wrong! While they had been saved out of a very sinful culture, they had, at least they should have, left it behind. So, if they reverted to the old way of life, they hadn't learned a thing. Such behavior is not to be excused. So, the drunkenness, brawling, and selfish hoarding of food was completely unacceptable. It was completely contrary to what it was meant to be – a remembrance of the body and shed blood of Jesus Christ and the most unselfish and other-centered act in all history.
- Communion was good. Everything about it is good. It should not produce heartache and dissension; it should draw Christ Followers together. That is why it is very appropriate that we join with the Church worldwide in this communion on World Communion Sunday. Communion proves that there are no borders for Christ Followers – we are citizens of a heavenly Kingdom first. Communion is for the good and it's a travesty if it is anything other than that. In a similar vein, Paul points out . . .

The ground is level at the Communion table

- Paul goes right into what he's been hearing with, *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.* 1 Corinthians 11:18. What a surprise, there were divisions! Actually not. Right from the beginning of this strident letter Paul has been castigating the Corinthian Church for their divisiveness and factions. They argued over who was the best preacher and who was the most effective baptizer. They were even suing each other in pagan courts. They

were the poster children of dissension when they were supposed the followers of the very one who stood for unity and acceptance. The bond of Christ had been displaced by the bondage of selfishness.

- Not only that, the haves made sure the have-nots stayed that way. From its very inception, the Church, which was approaching 20 years old at the time Paul wrote this, had enjoyed Love Feasts. The people ate together and enjoyed a commonality that accented fellowship and communion rather than class and division. We see in Acts, *They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people.* Acts 2:42-47. The Corinthians that Paul remembered from his time there had done exactly that, but had slid into dissipation. Their meals together had become a first come, first served, finders' keepers, losers' weepers free for all. That communion that was part of that meal, fell victim to every man for himself. In fact, they fell back into the old Greek practice of the more honored guests at the meal getting the best food and the best service.
- Paul, of course, comes against this practice with ferocity. Jesus died on the Cross to free people from sin including the sins of selfishness and superiority. And while the Corinthian Church had been largely from the lower classes, with a few from the upper classes, they had been brought together by the great equalizer. *ALL have sinned and come short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23), and that puts us all in the same class – we all need Jesus, no matter our income, race, occupation, party affiliation, whatever! We all need Jesus.
- Coming together at communion shows our common need for the Great Equalizer (you can tell I like that name) who died for every human being. The ground is level at the foot of the Cross and its level at the communion table. There is no seating chart around this table. That's why its good we have communion one month before the day after our presidential election – people who vote differently than you are sitting around this communion table today – Jesus died for them just as he did for you.
- I've been talking about it, and you know it, but let me say again . . .

Communion is a reminder of what Jesus did

- Again, this seems like a no-brainer, but it was forgotten in Corinth. Paul practically quotes word for word what we have in Luke 22:17-19 where we have Luke's account of the first Communion at the last supper, the night before Jesus was crucified. Listen to Paul's words again, *For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."* 1 Corinthians 11:23-25.
- They knew this, but Paul had to start from the beginning and remind them. Jesus's body was beaten, broken and pierced, and his blood shed, and he died on the Cross for humanity. He was the ultimate and final sacrifice to end all sacrifices. Jesus did that and they had better not forget it – but it seemed they had.
- F. B. Meyer puts in beautifully: *The Lord's Supper is intended not only to commemorate the supreme act of Calvary, but to enable us spiritually to incorporate into ourselves the very life and death of Jesus, so that we may be truly crucified with him and nevertheless live.*" We know this, right? But lest we think we're better than the Corinthians, let's remember that we can get so used to what we are doing that we, almost mechanically, participate around the Communion table and miss the significance. Let's ponder this again today as we take communion. In fact, let's remember that . . .

Communion is a proclamation

- Don't miss what Paul says in verse 26, *For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.* (v. 26) The behavior of the Corinthians wasn't proclaiming as much as it was screaming the fact that they had forgotten the meaning of the Lord's Supper. Their antics was telling not the story of the broken body and shed blood of the Messiah, but the drunken babbling of selfishness.
- We prepare for Communion reminding everyone here that Communion is something between the partaker and their Maker. We let you know that if you have made a profession of faith in Christ you are welcome

to receive Communion. In other words, we don't say who can and cannot partake – that is for the participant to prayerfully determine. That necessarily means then, that when you take communion, you are proclaiming you are a redeemed Follower of the Living Lord Jesus Christ. You are telling the world you are a Christ Follower. That's exactly what Paul means when he tells the Corinthians, *For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.* 1 Corinthians 11:26. And that means that every one of us must make sure to . . .

Be worthy and prepared as you come to the table

- And with this I'm turning to our celebration of Communion. As I just said, we always give a chance to prepare to partake. It's essential. Paul tells us in verses 27-30 that some of the Corinthian Church family had taken communion in an unworthy manner and had become sick and even had died. Now I don't know what that entailed – I mean, I don't know what illnesses they came down with or what their autopsy revealed when they died an untimely death. But I do know Paul is saying we **MUST** be properly prepared to gather at the table. So that is why we always give adequate time for everyone to search their hearts and make things right with God before we partake.
- F. B. Meyer, referring to the presenting problems in Corinth writes, "*We are liable to condemnation if we do not recognize the Body of Christ—that is, the Church—the unity of which is disturbed and obscured when there is dissension.*"
- What presenting problems, aka, sins do we need to bring to the foot of the Cross so that we do not eat or drink condemnation upon ourselves. That is between each individual and our Heavenly Father. So, let me conclude this talk right here, and transition into our Communion service with a time of preparation. Seek the Lord's face and silently pray and examine your heart. Let's make sure that every one of us who take the bread and cup are participating in a healthy meal. Amen

COMMUNION SERVICE