

A Rebuke for Abuses of the Lord's Supper

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

1 Corinthians 11:17-34: *"Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. **18** For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. **19** For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you. **20** Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. **21** For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. **22** What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you. **23** For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; **24** and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." **25** In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." **26** For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. **27** Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. **28** But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. **29** For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. **30** For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. **31** For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. **32** But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world. **33** Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. **34** But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come."*

Background Notes

In verse 2 the apostle Paul began to address the subject of public worship in the Church. He praised the Corinthians for holding firm to the "traditions" – the central teachings and doctrines of the Christian faith that Paul had delivered to them. However, some corrections were needed concerning their public worship, and two of these matters are taken up in chapter 11.

First, the recognition God's structure of authority in the Church was discussed in the first half of the chapter. Although there is no difference between men and women when it comes to salvation (as Galatians 3:28 makes clear), there is a difference between men and women in their role distinction and spiritual authority in the Church. 1 Timothy 2 also teaches that men are to be the spiritual leaders, and the public preachers in the church. The structure of authority in the Church was to be recognized by the symbol of a head covering in public worship (v13-16).

The celebration of the Lord's Supper is discussed in verses 17-34. The Corinthian church was involved in abuses of the Lord's Supper, and these problems had to be corrected.

Here's where background is helpful in understanding what was going on at the local church in Corinth. In the early Church, the Lord's Supper was celebrated as part of a fellowship meal called the "Love Feast," or "Agape Meal" - somewhat similar to a potluck dinner today. First the believers enjoyed a meal and fellowship together. Then they celebrated the Lord's Supper, and took up a collection for the needy.

The problems at Corinth included social divisions between rich and poor, and a lack of sufficient distinction between the Love Feast and the Lord's Supper. Thus they were lowering the very important significance of the Lord's Supper.

"...when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. For there must also be factions among you" (v18-19). There was division between the rich and poor Christians. *"For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk" (v21).* Apparently the richer believers were not sharing their expensive covered dishes with the poorer Christians - and they were even letting some of the poorer believers go hungry!

In addition, they weren't waiting for one another so that the meal could really be a time of sharing (v33). Some of them were gluttons – they were rushing ahead and gorging themselves before everyone had gathered. They were shaming the less fortunate and despising the church as the body of Christ.

Paul told them that if they were that hungry, and they weren't going to share, they should eat at home before coming for the fellowship meal (v34). *"Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you" (v22).*

Furthermore, some people were drinking too much during the Agape Meal, and thus they were drunk during the celebration of the Lord's Supper (v21).

Partaking of the bread and cup in an unworthy condition was sin against the body and blood of the Lord (v27)! These problems had to be corrected. This activity was very serious sin, and it would bring the judgment and discipline of God upon those believers.

Doctrinal Points

1. Treating the Lord's Supper lightly brings dishonor to the Lord.

In verses 23-26, the apostle Paul showed the importance of the Lord's Supper and how wrong it is to take it lightly. The Lord's Supper was inaugurated by the Lord Jesus Himself, the night before His death, and thus is of critical importance to the Church.

Verse 23-26: *“For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, “Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me.”*

In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death till He comes.”

The fact that the Lord specifically revealed to the apostle Paul how the Lord’s Supper was instituted demonstrates its importance. On the very night that He was betrayed, the Lord asked His followers to remember Him in this way. The Lord instituted the Lord’s Supper during the Passover meal. The bread and the wine were part of the Passover seder meal. The bread, when broken, **represented** our Lord’s body that was broken for us on the cross. Contrary to the doctrines of some churches, the bread did not (and does not) become the actual body of Christ, because the Lord was there in His complete human body at the time He institute the Lord’s Supper.

In the same way, the wine did not then, and does not now, become the actual blood of Christ. The wine **represents** the blood of Christ that was shed for us, that is the basis and seal of the new covenant. The “New Covenant” was made with Israel, as we know from Jeremiah 31. The new covenant will be kept with Israel, as we know from Romans 11.

But the blessings of the New Covenant are extended to all believers (Hebrews 8). As often as we celebrate the Lord’s Supper, we proclaim, or show forth, the Lord’s death. But it is not a re-sacrifice of Christ. No! The atoning work of Christ on the cross is finished! We remember this all-important sacrifice for our sins in the memorial feast of the Lord’s Supper. The Lord’s Supper proclaims the finished work of Christ.

Failing to recognize the importance of the Lord’s Supper, and treating it lightly (as the Corinthians were doing) is disgraceful and sinful activity. Those who treat it lightly **despise and belittle the body and blood of Christ!** Verse 27: *“Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body.”* Treating the Lord’s Supper lightly brings dishonor to the Lord.

2. Treating the Lord’s Supper lightly brings discipline from the Lord.

Before we come to the Lord’s table, we should examine ourselves, confess our sins, and get things right with anyone we may have wronged or offended (v28). If we do not to do so, we are treating the Lord’s Supper lightly, and failing to discern what it’s all about.

In the Lord’s Supper, we remember that the Lord had to die for our sins. Are we going to treat the *sacrifice of His life lightly*, by coming to His Table with unconfessed sin, and by refusing to give up sinful activities? This behavior dishonors the Lord – and it brings discipline from the Lord. *“When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we*

may not be condemned with the world.” God’s discipline for sin is administered because we are in His family, and it is for our own good.

What kind of discipline occurs if believers treat the Lord’s Supper lightly? Verse 30 makes it clear that the discipline may involve illness, and even disciplinary death. *“For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.”* Would God actually allow a Christian to become sick - and even die - because of sin? Yes. Do you remember the deaths of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5? Think about it. As a believer, if you were to fall into serious sin, wouldn’t you prefer that the Lord would take you home to Heaven immediately, before you brought further dishonor upon Him through continued sin?

The good news here is found in verse 31: *“If we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment.”* Let us continually examine and judge ourselves in the light of God’s Word. Treating the Lord’s Supper lightly brings discipline from the Lord.

Practical Application

Don’t jump to hasty conclusions about sick Christians.

1 Corinthians 11 teaches that God can and may use sickness as a means of discipline in His family. But when we understand this truth, what’s the obvious danger we must avoid? You guessed it! We must not quickly jump to the conclusion that every Christian who is sick (especially a prolonged or potentially fatal illness), is under the discipline of God for a sin he or she has committed.

It’s **wrong** to make such an assumption! Christians can become sick for all kinds of reasons - even from lack of common sense! So don’t jump to hasty conclusions when Christians are sick. Christians sometimes reach this kind of incorrect conclusion, with devastating results.

The Lord corrected His disciples for their inaccurate ideas about the man who was born blind in John 9:1-3: *“His disciples asked, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?’ ‘Neither this man nor his parents sinned,’ said Jesus. ‘This happened so that the work of God might be displayed in him.’”*

Let’s hear what our Lord is teaching here. Don’t jump to hasty conclusions about Christians who are ill.