

1 Cor.11:17-34 The Lord's Supper Shows Unity Falls OPC PM Mar. 7, 2021

Back in verse 2, Paul commended the church in Corinth for many of their practices in worship. However, when we get to verse 17, Paul does not commend them for the way that they have used The Lord's Supper.

In the church in the city of Corinth, they organized a huge fellowship meal, and had The Lord's Supper as part of that meal. In that meal, they lost the community aspect, and the privileged and wealthy went ahead and ate first, while others were waiting and waiting. To make things worse, during that meal, they did what the outside world did – they discriminated against poor people, which caused a division between the rich and the poor. Some poor people did not get food at all. When it came to The Lord's Supper within the worship service, some poor people did not even get the bread and cup, while some rich people had consumed so much wine, that they were getting drunk during The Lord's Supper.

How is that scene different from what was happening in all of the pagan temples in Corinth? The gospel was supposed demand a radical departure from custom of the world's religions. In the community formed by the gospel of the Kingdom, there is no room for giving special honor to the rich or to the influential.

Paul scolded them for these perversions of the most sacred of events in Christian worship.

This reveals our main point...**Right worship includes the right administration of The Lord's Supper, which shows the unity of the people of God.**

1. Misuses of the Lord's table lead to divisions. (v. 17-22)

The issue here is a disruption in the church caused by the actions of certain believers in Corinth who undermined the nature of the cross of Christ by insisting on individual rights or freedoms. Those with a secure position were too ready to enjoy their security and privileges while leaving those without that security to tag along as second-class citizens in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. What should happen instead, is Christians with resources should welcome Christians without resources to share in the Lord's Supper together with them.

The Lord's Supper shows unity between the wealthy and the poor, between the haves and the have nots. The Lord's Supper shows forth the body of Christ Jesus, but also shows forth the people – the body of Christ- are one.

Verse 17 - to have the Lord's Supper, but to do it wrong, causes more harm than good.

Verse 18 – to have divisions, when the whole point is unity, is an error of the highest magnitude.

Verse 19 – the divisions show who is genuine among you – those persons try to form bridges between the groups, because they understand unity.

Verse 20 – if they came together to have the Lord's Supper, but they did it wrong, it was not the Lord's Supper they were eating.

Verse 21 – one way that they were undoing the Lord’s Supper was that they were making was each person going ahead with his own meal, and not together enjoying their meal at the same time. They lacked patience and a courteous and humble mindset of togetherness. Another way that they were undoing the Lord’s Supper was that they were letting some people not get food at all, while other people got so much wine, that they ended up drunk. They lacked sharing, and they lacked self-control, and they lacked love.

Verse 22 – they were shocking Paul with the reports about their behavior. Paul wrote that they could have eaten in their homes before coming together for the Lord’s Supper, which shows the purpose of the Lord’s Supper is not to feed people physically. Their behavior revealed that they despise the group assembled to worship God, and their behavior also humiliated the people who ended up with nothing to eat or drink. Paul reversed the commendation that he had given in verse 2, with regard to their abuses of The Lord’s Supper. They were focused on certain powerful people, instead of focusing on Christ the Lord, whose supper it is! Jesus died for each person in the body of Christ, as one body. Whatever they were coming together to eat, it was not The Lord’s Supper.

Ever since chapter 1, Paul has been showing the central point of Christianity which must be ground for all that we do is the cross. The cross is the ground of what it means to be an apostle, what it means to be the church, and what we have in common as the various sinners saved by grace. In the same way, the practices which surround the symbolic meal of the church, ought to proclaim the Lord’s death on that cross. If we fail to do that at the Lord’s Supper, it undermines the very heart of why the worshipping community celebrates the Lord’s Supper at all.

1 Corinthians 1:18, “...*the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*”

1 Corinthians 1:28, “*God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, (v.29) so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.*”

The gospel turns upside down the power order of the world. All are equal in the presence of God at The Lord’s Supper. But the Corinthian believers were turning The Lord’s Supper upside down and introducing the world’s boasting for powerful people, and the world’s despising of lowly people. Paul wrote that you must not invert the values of the cross in the presence of the Lord at His own table, and call that The Lord’s Supper in a worship service of the Almighty God Himself.

The abuses of The Lord’s Supper was caused by divisions, and it would cause further divisions. Paul was very strong on these, which brings us to our second point – what should be the focus of The Lord’s Supper, and what would be the result of that?

2. The correct focus of The Lord’s Supper heals divisions. (v. 23-26)

Paul wrote for a recovering of the central defining focus of the sacrament.

Verse 23 – Jesus instituted it. It ever remains the supper that belongs to the Lord. The Lord presides over the supper always. It remains under His control. When? Jesus instituted it on the same night that Jesus was betrayed for us. What was the meal? Bread. A loaf of bread. One loaf.

Verse 24 – Jesus gave thanks. The focus of the event is giving thanks to God for our forgiveness. Jesus broke the bread. In those days they had loaves of bread that were not pre-sliced and in a bag. The bread came from the baker as a whole loaf, and the exterior of the loaf served as a casing without a need for a bag. The crust of the bread was hard, so to open the loaf would be to crack it, and it would make a sound that you could hear, the sound of cracking open the loaf. When Jesus did that, he then explained what it means, “This [bread] is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me.” The focus of the bread is Jesus. It is the body of Jesus. It is Jesus being given for us. It is to be eaten while being mindful of Jesus and His physical body being crucified for us, with deep and solemn gratitude.

Verse 25 – in the same way Jesus also took the cup. Notice it says after supper! The supper is the bread. The cup is the part of the event that follows the meal, and is commanded as an equal part of the meal’s meaning. Jesus explained by saying This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.” The cup is part of the event. The bread and the cup are inseparable. The Lord’s Supper must include both. You cannot just have the bread and call it the Lord’s Supper. You cannot just have the wine and call it the Lord’s Supper. The meal is the bread. The cup belongs with it. The cup represents the covenant. The cup shows us God’s promise. How was God’s promise to save us fulfilled? By the blood of Jesus being spilled from his five wounds upon the cross, until he died. Whenever we celebrate The Lord’s Supper, we remember these truths while we drink this cup. We put our minds back on the spiritual matters of God’s promise, the fulfillment by the crossblood, and the love of Jesus demonstrated for us, despite our wrongdoings.

Verse 26 – the one central message that is given out by The Lord’s Supper is the death of Jesus. Every single time we come together to eat the bread and to drink the cup, we announce again the death of Jesus that took place for us years ago. We draw attention to the death of the Lord by our action of eating and by our action of drinking. Tied up together with the death of Christ is the resurrection of Christ. This is clear within the very same sentence in verse 26. Until He comes. Jesus will be coming from heaven to earth to take us home to heaven, where there will be an end to the Lord’s Supper. In order to do all of this Jesus of course did rise from the dead on the third day, then He ascended to heaven on the 40th day after that, and He will come back for us on the last day. Jesus will gather us, and we will come together not for The Lord’s Supper as we know it now, but rather for

the Supper of the Lamb, the Wedding Feast of the Bride of Christ being united to Christ our Groom. Revelation 19:6, “*Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.*”

The difference between The Lord’s Supper and the Marriage supper of the Lamb is the presence of Jesus, instead of being a spiritual presence from a distance, it will be the physical presence of Jesus, IN PERSON.

The rest is details.

The right focus of the Lord’s Supper is Jesus, crucified, risen, ascended, glorified, coronated, and promising to come again for us.

This focus of the Lord’s Supper heals our divisions, caused by our sin and our falling into the familiar exclusive traps of the world and the subtle deception of the evil one. When we have The Lord’s Supper correctly, we come together again as many sinners saved by grace and brought into one joyful loving family, and our mood during this sacrament is thankful.

3. Care must be taken to properly partake together. (v. 27-31)

Verse 27 – for you to eat wrongly is for you to be implicated in the wrong being done against Christ and His body of people.

Verse 28 – the chief caution to take is to examine yourself. You are examining not for perfection, but for sin that is driving you to Christ and His cross. We are searching not for whether we are good enough to deserve this blessing of this bread and cup, but instead for whether we are focused on Jesus who saves us from our sins. The focus is Jesus our Savior. The focus is not on our sins. So examine yourself and see whether you are thankful to Jesus to cleanse you of your sins. Can you focus on the body of Jesus crucified, and the blood of Jesus spilled for your sins, and can you be overwhelmed with gratitude? Then you passed your exam.

Verse 29 – If we don’t discern Jesus crucified during the Lord’s Supper, then we are not correctly partaking The Lord’s Supper, and we are under God’s judgment.

Verse 30 – the evidence of God’s judgment was seen in the ancient church in Corinth. Many were weak or ill, and a considerable number had died.

Verse 31 – But it is not necessary to receive judgment. Only when we do not judge ourselves, then we are judged.

Verse 32 – God does not ultimately execute His people, or consign us to weakness or sickness because of our sins. Instead, God saves us, and after saving us, God disciplines us to train us in the right ways.

Verse 33 – what is the right way? To come together and partake together. To wait for each other. To share the bread and cup with each other. To be considerate of one another.

Verse 34 – to prepare for the celebration of the Lord’s Supper by removing distractions ahead of time. Those who were hungry were to eat at home before coming together to worship.

Concluding Application: *The Lord's Supper shows unity.*

Too often we individualize our experience of The Lord's Supper. It is not just an opportunity for all of us to have personal piety at the same moment. It is more. This is a time for all the members of the church to come together and to experience TOGETHER our relationships to Christ and our relationships to each other. In addition, we have the opportunity to proclaim the gospel to the watching world.

Our question to ask as we partake of The Lord's Supper is, "How am I treating my brothers and sisters right now?"

Do you see how that is different from asking, "what sins have I committed that I need to confess?"

In other words, Christ does not say, "Take a bath," as if this is a personally cleansing experience for your soul.

Rather, Christ says to all of us together as we gather together, "Come and be with the family of God. Celebrate the fact that sin does not separate you from each other. You are able to get along because of Christ.

Celebrate the fact that nothing divides you. Not wealth or poverty, not male or female. Nothing keeps you separated into little groups.

We are one family, one body, one church.

We are unified.

Do you know how many ways we can be fractured? Jew and Gentile is a racial separation. No, we are one in Christ.

Classification by levels of money is stratification separation. We are one.

Education separates people. Some have degrees, some do not. We are one.

Hobbies separate people as much as they unite people. Some like to cook, others like to hunt and fish. We are one.

Politics separate people as much as they unite people.

Dr. D.A. Carson wrote this, "The church is made up of natural enemies. What binds us together is not common education, common race, common income levels, common politics, common nationality, common accents, common jobs, or anything else of that sort. Christians come together because we have all been saved by Christ Jesu, and we owe him our common allegiance...we are a band of natural enemies who love one another only for Jesus' sake."

This is incredible, and needs to be celebrated. How should we celebrate it?

The celebration is The Lord's Supper. *The Lord's Supper shows unity.*