
The Celebration of our Union with Christ

1 Corinthians 11:17-35

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Being in Christ is not an imaginary idea that simply expresses a theological notion. It is a deep spiritual reality that has surprising consequences. The Lord's Table is so much more of an expression of what it means to be in Christ and to be united to His Body than we often realize.

Strong Words of Correction (v.17-22)

Why was the Lords' Table at Corinth a meeting together for worse, not better and could not be commended by Paul?

¹⁷ But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. ¹⁸ For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, ¹⁹ for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. ²⁰ When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. ²¹ For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. ²² What! Do you not have houses 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 commend you in this? No, I will not.

The Assembling of the people

The gatherings of the church were not for the better. What was going on was actually becoming worse. The gatherings of the church should make the unifying power of the gospel visible. But that is not what was happening there.

The Attitude of the people

These divisions were NOT theological. They were social, cultural, ethnic and financial. They were artificial divisions denying their essential oneness. They were looking down on the slaves and the poor. They created visible division where there should have been true visible oneness.

The Actions of the people

They violated their union in Christ. To introduce cultural, social, financial, ethnic, racial divisions, treating one group as superior than others or a group as inferior is a despicable breach of the what the Lord's Table is to represent.

They violated their communion in Christ. Food and eating together has always been a means of fellowship with God and with one another. But when at the potluck agape feast, one group arrived late and was not waited on. The point is not why it happened, but that the people did not think that waiting on others to fellowship all together was important.

You know what is most troubling? Look at the last questions from Paul. The people actually expected Paul to commend them for what they were doing. Shocking!!!

Reminding Words of Instruction (v.23-26)

What is the connection between this paragraph and what is around it?

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴ 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." ²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

The Lord's Table is not only a celebration of Christ's work, but an affirmation of our union in Christ as the Body of Christ.

There was a betrayal

Paul alludes Judas' betrayal. He failed to recognize the Lord and to live as one with God's true people. He betrayed the Lord for money. The implication then is clear: a failure to recognize the Body as we share communion is a betrayal of the Lord.

There was a broken body

Jesus' physical body was broken as the means by which our sins were punished. This broken body which we rejoice in was to unite His people through the cross. All that breaks our spiritual unity mars the picture of what we are partaking in. We are sharing this together. Without Jesus' broken body there is no union in Christ and no communion with the saints.

There was life in the New Covenant

Jesus' perfect life was poured out in death. This paid the price for our salvation and washed our sins away. But it is a distinct part of the New Covenant. Jesus' outpoured life made possible that all of God's people in the New Covenant would be one. To drink the cup is to say, "We have this life in Christ as all in the New Covenant."

There is a proclamation made

The proclamation of the death of Jesus is done as a corporate event. Jesus' death and resurrection, that is, the gospel, is proclaimed when we share together the Lord's Table in a Biblical way.

Clear Words of Explanation (v.27-35)

Why is this failure at the Lord's Table such a terrible problem? Fundamentally, it is a breach of our union in Christ. His body was broken and His life was poured out for us. Therefore, we must not celebrate the Lord's Table in any way that fails to acknowledge and therefore breaks the Body of Christ.

²⁷ Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. ³⁰ That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. ³¹ But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. ³² But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

³³ So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another—
³⁴ if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for judgment. About the other things I will give directions when I come.

Now, we have some clear (and maybe not so clear)

Partake only if assured of being in Christ

We invite any who have believed and bowed to Christ and publicly professed faith to share with us. But I also encourage you to seriously examine yourself to come to an assurance that you are in Christ. Some of you are not sure. Some of you are sure and shouldn't be. Some of us have a deep inner sense that we are truly in Christ.

Partake fully accepting all as equally in Christ

We do not share the Lord's table in our private little individualistic bubble. This is not about YOU and Jesus. This is about Jesus and US. It is about all of us. This is a communion - this means that we interact and engage and accept one another. Only unbelievers are excluded because this is only for those who are in Christ and it is for all who are in Christ.

Partake knowing the possible consequences

But understand this. In the church at Corinth there were people who were sick and some had died. Why? Because they did not take this seriously. The taking of the Lord's table as an unbeliever is a serious, serious thing. AT the table, to exclude anyone in your attitude or actions because of culture, financial status, ethnicity, color of skin, shape of eyes - any of that is a serious breach of our union in Christ.

Partake in a way that reflects what has been taught

So, we will share the Lord's Table. We are not at a meal. But we will share with fellowship, love, testimonies experiencing the grace of God.

Serving of the Table

Instructions for sharing...

We share this meal together as God's people. We invite all who have a public profession of faith through baptism to share with us.

We are remembering the work of Christ and receiving transforming grace.

We are experiencing the presence of Christ, not in the elements, but among us, His people.

We do not participate in the Lord's Table because we are worthy, because we have confessed our sins, righted our relationships and are all good with God. We come to this table and eat and drink only because of what Jesus has done for us. He has made us worthy to share in this because of what this very ordinance celebrates. So we do not use this a time of introspection, but as a time of joy and celebration. Joy is holy. Take joy, my beloved.

In the Spirit of unity, we wait to eat and drink together.

Optional: As we are being served, we will share testimonies and have prayers of gratitude to God for His great gift to us, His Redeeming and Ruling Son, Our King.

The breaking of the bread...

The sharing of the cup...