

# In Remembrance of Me

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

*Pastor Tim Melton*

*<sup>17</sup> 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. <sup>18</sup> 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, <sup>19</sup> for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. <sup>20</sup> When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. <sup>21</sup> For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. <sup>22</sup> 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.*

In the early church we see evidence that people in the congregations would come together regularly to share in fellowship meals. Eating together was an important part of community living for both the Jewish and Greco-Roman cultures. In the book of Jude, we see that for some these fellowship meals had even come to be known as “love feasts”.

Sitting at a table and eating with others always has a corporate purpose to it. You share food. You share conversation. You serve each other. You look into each other's eyes, you appreciate each other's stories, you feel each other's emotions, recognizing each other's worth as you sit in each other's presence. There is a sense of shared experience. Throughout scripture you see this sense of fellowship as people ate together.

We see this sense of intimacy around the table in Revelation 3:20, when Jesus said, *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.”*

In the early church these meals were at times accompanied by an observance of the Lord's Supper. They were fellowship meals, but they also had a sacred purpose to them. The observance of the Lord's Supper

was not only an individual event, it had a corporate focus as well. As they joined in the Lord's Supper they were not sitting alone. They were sitting side-by-side with Christian brothers and sisters who were also remembering the body and the blood of Christ. They were gathered together in that place bound not by where they were from, how much money they had, how educated they were or what language they spoke, but united in the fact that they had the same heavenly Father and the same Savior.

It was in this type of special fellowship event that problems had occurred. Some people were focused on eating their own meals and did not wait for others. They were totally missing out on an opportunity to grow closer to the other believers. At the same time, they were ignoring the hungry members of their church who were sitting in the same room and had no food at all. Others were even getting drunk.

Some might have claimed ignorance because many of the pagan religions worshipped by having wild, riotous banquets for their false gods, but regardless of their background they were now followers of Christ and this was a mockery. A beautiful time of community and fellowship had been planned, and instead of ending with the Lord's Supper and the remembrance of Christ's selfless sacrifice, it was being remembered for the drunkenness, gluttony and selfishness of those who attended.

These children of God who were in the church in Corinth were no longer united by Christ. Instead they had forgotten the gospel and were now being pulled apart by division and their own selfish desires. They might have been following the outward rituals of eating the bread and drinking the wine, but without a heart that was right with God and right with others they were not observing the Lord's Supper.

Paul then writes something very unexpected: ***"I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized."***

One of the clearest indicators that one is walking with Christ is the way that they respond to contention, division and the selfishness of others. Those who are walking in the gospel will respond as Christ, with humility, compassion and gentleness, even when they are sinned against. It is in the midst of division that we find out who are truly spiritual among us. In the words of the Apostle Paul, it is amid factions "that those who are genuine among us are recognized".

Paul refuses to commend their sinful actions. Instead he directs them to the only solution. He turns their attention back to the Lord's Supper and the gospel of Christ.

***<sup>23</sup> 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, <sup>24</sup> 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." <sup>25</sup> 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." <sup>26</sup> For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.***

To get a fuller understanding of the Lord's Supper we need to go back to the earliest parts of the Bible. In Exodus 12, it tells how the Hebrews, the descendants of Abraham, had been slaves in Egypt for

generations. Moses, speaking for God, commanded Pharaoh to release God's people, but Pharaoh refused time and time again. God brought plagues against the Egyptians and against their false gods, but Pharaoh refused to obey and let the Hebrews go free. As the final judgment, God brought a plague of death that killed every first-born son in Egypt. On the night when death came over Egypt, God called the Hebrews to put the blood of a male lamb without imperfections and with no broken bones, over the doorframes of their homes. By this blood of an innocent lamb they were protected, and the death passed over their homes. Lambs were sacrificed to save the life of God's people.

The Jews were instructed to observe Passover each year to remember what God had done for them. In Exodus 12, the Jews were commanded to, ***"Obey these instructions (of the Passover meal) as a lasting ordinance for you and your descendants."*** It was to be a way of passing down, to generations to come, a testimony to the greatness of their God. It was an annual meal that spoke of God's deliverance from the past, but also God's ultimate deliverance in the future.

It was during a sacred Passover meal, on this reverent night of the year, that the Last Supper occurred. It was a simple upper room, a group of ordinary men, in a small country, but it would change the world forever. The Messiah had finally come, but not just for the Jews. He had come for people of every nation. They would observe the Passover meal as had been done thousands of times before, but this time would be different. It was no longer to celebrate the past and the future. It would now be a statement about the present. The Christ Himself would participate in the meal and fulfill the messianic prophecies this very night. Jesus was the Passover lamb, come to take away the sins of the world.

Though the Passover meal had several different elements, Christ chose to use only two to be used for the Lord's Supper. The bread of the Passover meal was seen as the "bread of affliction" which was eaten by the enslaved Jews back in Egypt. As one partook of the bread in the Passover meal of Jesus' day their minds were to be taken back to the suffering that was endured by the Jews who had been enslaved in Egypt. The "bread of affliction" and God's deliverance come together in Christ. His body was broken for us so that we, too, could be ransomed from our slavery to sin.

Isaiah the prophet wrote about it this way:

***"Surely, he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all."*** (Isaiah 53:4-6)

Jesus is the Bread of Life. He is our daily bread. He is our manna from heaven. He is everything that we need. As we eat the bread we are reminded of the affliction, the deliverance, and the provision of our Savior.

In John 6 we find these verses:

***“<sup>25</sup> Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst” (. . .) “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. <sup>54</sup> Whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day.”***

To many this was a very disturbing statement. “Eat my flesh and drink my blood.” For our “civilized” ears this is at first offensive. Jesus is merely making a very simple analogy. If I am the bread of life, then through faith take me in, ingest me, consume me, take all of me that you can, feast on me, rely on me to be your strength and your provision as your daily sustenance, as your source of life. We cannot just acknowledge Christ as Lord with our mouths or a loud “amen”. There is a point at which we must apply Him to our lives by fully putting our trust in Him.

In the words of Douglas Wilson: ***“You cannot address your hunger by looking at pictures of food. You cannot hear music by staring at a page of music notes. You cannot quench your thirst by thinking about the idea of water. No, in all such things you must come to the point of application.”***<sup>1</sup>

Some have read particular verses in scripture literally and believed that *the bread and the juice turn into the actual* body of Christ during the Lord’s Supper observance (John 6:32-58; Matthew 26:26; and 1 Corinthians 11:24-25), but this literal interpretation is problematic. In scripture Jesus also says that He is the vine, the living water, and the door. In these scriptures, Christ is not telling us that He literally becomes these things.

The scriptures we just read from John 6 about eating Christ’s body and drinking His blood were said while Jesus was speaking out on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. He was speaking to the large group of people who kept following Him because He had miraculously provided bread and fish for them. It was not said in conjunction with the Lord’s Supper at all. The first Lord’s Supper had not even happened yet.

Jesus’ own disciples also had trouble understanding Jesus’ words of ***“whoever feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life”*** (John 6:54). In response to His disciples Jesus clarified its meaning in the following verses with these words: ***“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life”*** (John 6:63). Jesus states here that His words are “spirit”. Jesus was using physical, tangible concepts, such as eating and drinking to teach a spiritual truth. Those who, through faith, take Me in, feast on Me, rely on Me to be their strength and their provision as their daily sustenance, will be given eternal life. When Jesus talks of the bread by saying, ***“This is my body”*** he is completing the symbolism of the Passover meal.

The wine during the Lord’s Supper was a symbol of Christ’s blood that was shed on the cross for us. Blood was chosen by God to be the symbol of life itself. In Leviticus 17:11, it says, ***“For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.”*** In Hebrews 9:22, we are told that ***“without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin.”*** That was the reason for the Passover lamb. All the sacrifices of

---

<sup>1</sup> <http://exploringfortruth.blogspot.com.es/2012/08/lords-supper-devotion-remembering.html#.Wsvn8YhubIU>

the Old Testament were rituals that were temporary in effect and had to be repeated over and over again. They pointed to the true sacrifice that was still to come in Christ. Sin against an infinite and holy God demanded an infinite and holy sacrifice. When Jesus Christ, the perfect Son of God, died, the full wrath of God was satisfied. Jesus Christ was truly the eternal ***“Lamb of God who came to take away the sins of the world”*** (John 1:29). Similar to the lamb’s blood at Passover, it was the shed blood of Christ that covered the guilt of man and protects man from the judgment of God. No other sacrifice will ever be required.

***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.***

Because of the importance of the Lord’s Supper, Paul offers instruction and warning to the Corinthians. Beware of taking the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner. This was not said to exclude people from the table, but more to call them to preparation.

We must understand this phrase, “unworthy manner”. That does not imply that we must first make ourselves worthy to observe the Lord’s Supper. We will never be worthy to sit at the Lord’s table. Without Christ we are all sinful and undeserving. None of us will ever be worthy in our own right. The phrase focuses more on the worth of Christ and the Lord’s Supper. We should never observe the Lord’s Supper in a manner that belittles its worth. In a child’s sense, they should not come to the table to eat before their hands have been washed. In the same way we should not sit at the Lord’s table without taking the time to have had our hearts cleansed.

As we have seen in these verses, there were those in the Corinthian church who had defiled the observance of the Lord’s Supper through their actions and the conditions of their hearts. They had brought judgment on themselves to the point that some had become ill and even died. But if we take the time to truly examine our hearts before we observe the Lord’s Supper, then judgment will not come upon us. If not, we as believers will be disciplined by our heavenly Father, so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

We each are to examine ourselves to see if we are prepared to rightly observe the Lord’s Supper. Let us first pray along with the Psalmist who said, ***“Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts! And see if there be any grievous way in me and lead me in the way everlasting!”*** (Psalm 139:23-24). Then may we examine our relationship with Christ for any unconfessed sin or point of rebellion in our hearts, trusting that the Holy Spirit will bring to mind any sin (John 16:8). As Paul mentions, ***“You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons”*** (1 Corinthians 10:21). Or as John said, ***“Do not love the***

***world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him”*** (1 John 2:15). We are to come to the Lord’s table with a singular devotion to Christ.

We come to the Lord’s table as children who have been adopted. Enemies who have been reconciled. Foreigners who have been made citizens. Sinners who have been made saints. With this in mind may we humble our hearts, turn from our sin, forgive one another, make things right with those whom we have wronged, and submit anew to the Lordship of Christ with all gratitude.

May we search our hearts to see if we are the source of any division between ourselves and another brother or sister in Christ. May we pray that God will remove any root of prejudice, envy, bitterness or pride within our church body. If so, may we be driven to confession and action that rights any wrong. We will never be perfect or sinless, but may our hearts be turned towards Christ and not away from Him. In this way we will be prepared to sit at the Lord’s table.

***<sup>33</sup> So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another— <sup>34</sup> 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.***

In these final verses, Paul is having to teach not just the gospel, but etiquette and manners that should flow out of the gospel. We see two sides of discipleship here. To some extent, when a person comes to faith in Christ, their life is transformed immediately. Because of the gospel, their identity, desires, thoughts and actions change. While some changes are immediate, there will be other areas of character and behaviors that will take longer to be conformed to Christ. This is the lifelong process of sanctification, being made holy one day at a time.

That is what Paul is doing here. He is giving practical instructions of how a Christian should live. We would wish that the arrival of the gospel would have immediately fixed everything. Don’t be mistaken. The arrival of the gospel has brought righteousness and reconciliation to God. Now we must rely on Christ as we learn how to live out this righteousness in our every day lives, moment by moment.

Like a father teaching his children, Paul instructs the Corinthians to wait for one another and to eat at home before they come, so that they will not sin and be judged when they come together. In conclusion, he lets them know that they will talk about other issues that need to be addressed when he comes.

These verses are a reminder to us of the importance of continuing to preach the gospel to ourselves. We must not forget who we are in Christ and the reality of God in which we live. As we remember our past lostness and His saving grace, it will result in a daily dose of humility, gratitude, love, mercy and peace in our lives. As we live in the midst of the gospel, we will then be made more holy day by day.

The Lord’s Supper is a corporate preaching of the gospel to ourselves as a congregation. As we proclaim His gospel in our midst, we are drawn to a greater love of God and a greater love of each other. Through a regular remembrance of the gospel through the observance of the Lord’s Supper, we will become the people of God, the church, that we were intended to be.

### Discussion Questions:

- 1) What in these scriptures were most meaningful to you?
- 2) When we observe the Lord's Supper what impacts you most?
- 3) Why does the observance of Lord's Supper help a church be united in Christ?
- 4) In your own words, explain Paul's instruction to "examine yourself" before observing the Lord's Supper.
- 5) If you are a believer in Christ, were there changes that you saw in your life when you received Christ?
- 6) What do you believe that God wants you to remember from this lesson on 1 Corinthians 11:17-34? How might you apply them?