

Misusing the Lord's Supper
1 Corinthians 11:17-34
May 2nd, 2021

1. _____ the Lord's Supper (11:17-22)
2. The _____ of the Lord's Supper (11:23-26)
3. _____ for the Lord's Supper (11:27-34)
4. Where should we look when we take the Lord's Supper?
 - a. Look _____: Remember what Jesus accomplished on the cross (11:23-26).
 - b. Look _____: Examine your heart for hardened apathy, especially toward other Christians (11:27-32).
 - c. Look _____: Celebrate your union with Christ (10:16).
 - d. Look _____: Celebrate your union with each other as one body (11:33-34).
 - e. Look _____: Proclaim the gospel to unbelievers who are present (11:26).
 - f. Look _____: Anticipate that Jesus is coming back (11:26).

Questions for Discussion/Reflection on 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

1. Is there anything that confuses you about the Lord's Supper? What are some different ways you have seen churches practice the Lord's Supper?
2. Read Exodus 12:1-14, 24-27. What parallels do you notice between the Passover meal and the Lord's Supper?
3. Why would Paul say that "there must ... be factions among you"? (11:19) What painful purpose is sometimes accomplished by divisions in the body? Does that contradict what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 1:10?
4. How would you summarize the problem with the way they were taking the Lord's Supper? Can you think of any parallel situations in the modern church?
5. Read Hebrews 8:8-13. What do you observe about the New Covenant and how it compares to the Old Covenant? What does Jesus mean in 1 Cor. 11:25 when He says, "this cup is the new covenant in My blood"?
6. Based on the context and the command to examine oneself, what does it mean to partake in an "unworthy manner"? How is that different than saying certain people are unworthy of communion?

Read Hebrews 12:6-11. What is the purpose of the Lord's discipline? Who does He discipline? How does that explain 1 Cor. 11:30-32?

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Big idea: The Lord's Supper is a memorial of His death and a picture of our unity with and through Him, so it must not be distorted or misused.

Intro

Imagine if you show up to a Thanksgiving meal and instead of gratitude and good food, all you hear is complaining. In fact, it seems intentional. They decided to incorporate Festivus from Seinfeld into Thanksgiving and it became an airing of grievances rather than an airing of gratitude. You might conclude that they missed the point of the day – it's a day for "Thanksgiving" and they made it a day for complaining – the opposite of giving thanks. .

That's what was happening with the Lord's Supper in Corinth. They missed the point completely and rather than being a unifying event it was a dividing event in which the "haves" were separated from the "have nots."

While we may not be guilty of the exact same misuse of the Lord's Supper, the correction and warnings about misusing the Lord's Supper are so helpful for us to hear.

1. **Distorting** the Lord's Supper (11:17-22)

- a. When they come together it is not for the better but for the worse.
 - i. Notice throughout is the implication that the church gathers – the come together (v. 17), the come together (v. 18), the meet together (v. 20), they come together (v. 33), they come together (v. 34).
 - ii. Being a Christian is so much more than gathering with other Christians. We're saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. But then, we're not alone. He places us into a family. Like any family, it's on a spectrum of disfunction. Your family might have the quirky uncle who shows up to Thanksgiving, but he's still family. Every church will have their quirky uncles, their conflicts, even divisions. Life with people is messy. And yet we come together.
 - iii. Paul confronts them on their problems but he doesn't say, "you guys just need to disband this whole enterprise. It's too toxic for you to be there. You just need to get some alone time." No! He says this isn't good, you're even inviting God's judgment and discipline, but come together and fix it.
- b. Divisions existed in the local church that were evident in their distorted practice of the Lord's Supper.
 - i. The positive outcome of a negative experience – divisions were awful. They are awful. Anyone who has gone through a church split or a period of intense division in a body knows the pain of strained or severed relationships. However, this passage tells us that they must happen at times. Why?
 - ii. Divisions can reveal the reality of saving faith and commitment to the Word.
 1. Matthew 13 – the parable of the tares (weeds) and the wheat – Jesus tells a parable of a landowner who learns that an enemy has planted weeds in his field among all his wheat crop. His workers ask what they should do, "should we pull them up?" "No," the master says, "If we do so we will pull up the wheat also. Let's wait until the harvest. Then we will gather the weeds and burn them and then gather the wheat." The point, as Jesus goes on to explain, is that there will always be within churches those who know Christ and are truly saved and those who don't and may be deceiving themselves. Only at the judgment will that be fully revealed.

2. One painful benefit that comes from conflict and division in a church is that it can reveal what people are trusting in, what they are following, what they want. And sometimes it reveals that they were not really trusting in Christ anyways.
 3. **1 John 2:19** They went out from us, but they were not *really* of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but *they went out*, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.
- c. What was supposed to be a communal activity showing their union with Christ and each other became an opportunity for some to eat and drink while others were left out.
- i. The early church often practiced a communal meal, called a “love feast” (Jude 1:12), in which they ate a meal together and then took communion at the end.
 - ii. What was happening instead is that some were getting stuffed by eating first and others were left out, hungry.
 - iii. Those who “have nothing” were shamed (v. 22)
 - iv. Implies it was a division along economic lines.
 1. For this division – this distortion of the Lord’s Supper – Paul could not praise them.
2. The **purpose** of the Lord’s Supper (11:23-26)
- a. “For...” – What he is about to say in explaining the Lord’s Supper is not dropped in so that we would have something to read when we take communion. It is to explain that they have been missing the purpose in how they are practicing it.
 - b. “Received...delivered” are technical terms for passing on instruction.
 - i. This is language the church was using very early on to explain the practice of communion.
 - c. Jesus was at a Passover meal with His disciples.
 - i. **Exodus 12:14** 'Now this day will be a memorial to you, and you shall celebrate it *as* a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations you are to celebrate it *as* a permanent ordinance.
 - ii. **Exodus 12:24-27** "And you shall observe this event as an ordinance for you and your children forever. ²⁵ "When you enter the land which the LORD will give you, as He has promised, you shall observe this rite. ²⁶ "And when your children say to you, 'What does this rite mean to you?' ²⁷ you shall say, 'It is a Passover sacrifice to the LORD who passed over the houses of the sons of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but spared our homes.'" And the people bowed low and worshiped.
 - iii. They would remember God’s deliverance together even though it was 14 centuries earlier. They would eat the unleavened bread and recall God’s deliverance. The Exodus cemented the identity of the people of Israel and as they ate the Passover meal year after year, they were reminded of that identity – they were a people who had been rescued.
 1. People benefit from tangible experiences that remind them of truth.
 2. That’s what this meal did.
 3. Jesus repurposed the meal to teach about His greater deliverance from a greater slavery.
 - d. Gordon Fee – the ordinary Jewish meal began with the head of the house giving the traditional blessing over the bread, breaking it, and giving it to those at table with him. Jesus as the teacher undoubtedly played that role in meals with the disciples. ... remarkable thing that he reinterpreted the meaning of the bread, as he was distributing it, in terms of his own death: this is my body, which is for you
 - e. “This is my body” – not literally His body in any sense, He was still sitting right there with Him.

- i. But it would be in “remembrance of” Him.
- ii. Just as the Passover meal was a memorial in Exodus 12:14.
- iii. His body “which is for you” has a ring of Isaiah 53 in it

1. **Isaiah 53:12** Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors.

- f. As He took the cup and said “this cup is the new covenant in My blood” it was a reference to Exodus when Moses read to the people the covenant they were making with God, what we call the Mosaic Covenant, with it’s promises of blessing and enjoyment of the land for obedience and cursing for disobedience and then sprinkled the blood of the sacrifice on them.
 - i. **Exodus 24:5-8** He sent young men of the sons of Israel, and they offered burnt offerings and sacrificed young bulls as peace offerings to the LORD. ⁶ Moses took half of the blood and put *it* in basins, and the *other* half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. ⁷ Then he took the book of the covenant and read *it* in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!" ⁸ So Moses took the blood and sprinkled *it* on the people, and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words."
- g. As often as we drink it – not prescribing how often that would be – daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly – but as often as partake we proclaim His death until He comes.
 - i. He doesn’t die again each time, there isn’t a re-sacrifice as some have taught.
- h. Can we see then how they were misusing it?
 - i. They were treating it as a meal to get stuffed with their friends, leaving out others from the body.

3. **Preparing** for the Lord’s Supper (11:27-34)

- a. We are warned against eating/drinking in an unworthy manner.
 - i. Notice it is about an unworthy manner not unworthy people. If we think, I can’t come because I’ve sinned. I can’t take communion because I lost my temper this week, I slipped up in some other area of sin, etc. We’re all unworthy. It’s not about whether we deserve to approach the Lord or not.
 - 1. Jesus came into the world to save sinners. If you’re a sinner, He can save you!
 - ii. But there can be an unworthy manner in which people partake.
 - 1. In context, the most obvious example would be unrepentant, unresolved division in the body in which you are unwilling to move toward reconciliation and are fostering division.
 - 2. You could expand that out to an unrepentant heart that wants to go through the motions or satisfy a guilty conscience but doesn’t really want to repent or change.
 - iii. Steven Um - It is a question of whether one is approaching with indifference or an unrepentant heart. Paul is calling the Christians to examine themselves, not to find reasons they are unworthy, but to find evidence of a repentant heart—evidence that grace is at work. If a believer has a repentant heart, he or she should be coming to the Table. ... The only time Christians should refrain from the Table is when they find hardened apathy within themselves about their relationship with God and/or others.

1. *Hardened apathy*

- b. When we come unworthily we dishonor the death of Jesus, and in that sense we are guilty.
 - i. We are failing to “judge the body rightly” (v. 29) or discern the body (ESV) or recognize the body (CSB).
 - ii. Could be a reference to Jesus’ body that was given for us or Jesus’ body that He created – the church. That would fit the context as well.
 - c. The solution is to examine ourselves.
 - i. Am I just going through a religious motion here?
 - ii. Am I experiencing a hardened apathy in that I know that there is sin in my life but I don’t care and I refuse to change?
 - d. The shocking warning is that the Lord may discipline His people for making a mockery of the Lord’s Supper.
 - i. “For this reason many among you are weak and sick and a number sleep” (v. 30)
 - ii. But this discipline is corrective and restorative not condemning.
 - iii. Nassali - When God judges a Christian, his judgment is different from how he judges a non-Christian (and different from how pagans think their gods vindictively and arbitrarily punish people). God condemns non-Christians, but he disciplines Christians (cf. Heb. 12:5–11). The goals of punishment and discipline differ; punishment upholds justice, whereas discipline transforms character. One purpose of God’s discipline is so that Christians will not experience condemnation. In other words, divine discipline is a God-ordained means for Christians to persevere.²⁰⁰
 - e. He ends by returning to the original problem and advises a simple solution.
 - i. Those who want a big meal with their friends – eat at home! But with *this meal*, the Lord’s Supper, wait for one another and include one another.
4. Where should we look when we take the Lord’s Supper?

Several different authors have used this 6-fold answer

- a. Look **Back**: Remember what Jesus accomplished on the cross (11:23–26).
 - i. We do this “in remembrance of” Jesus.
 - ii. We can be guilty of putting everything else on center stage of the church – marriage improvement, parenting strategies, growing numbers, growing budgets, getting out of debt, integrating new people, perfecting the sound, enhancing music – that we lose track of the main thing.
 - iii. The main thing is you have a God who humbled Himself, took on humanity, died, and came back from the dead. And He did this for you.
- b. Look **In**: Examine your heart for hardened apathy, especially toward other Christians (11:27–32).
 - i. Not an extended morbid introspection but an honest, grace-empowered reflection on the state of your own heart. Are you weary? Come to the table! Are you broken? Come!
 - ii. Are you going through the motions but not really believing? Don’t come, yet.
 - iii. Are you persisting in known, unrepentant sin that you are choosing to hold onto? Don’t come – or better yet, repent and come!
- c. Look **Up**: Celebrate your union with Christ (10:16).

- i. **1 Corinthians 10:16** Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ?
 - ii. We fellowship with Him! It's not a magic event and He is always present with us, but in the Lord's Supper we follow in an activity given to us by Jesus stretching back 20 centuries and there is a particular sweetness in our fellowship with Him.
- d. Look **Around**: Celebrate your union with each other as one body (11:33–34).
 - i. Not only is it vertical (union with Jesus), it is horizontal. We who are many are one in Jesus. Many different ages, many struggles, many stories, many languages, many national backgrounds, many interests – but we are one.
- e. Look **Outward**: Proclaim the gospel to unbelievers who are present (11:26).
 - i. "We proclaim the Lord's death until He comes"
 - ii. If a non-Christian comes they may be a little weirded out by communion, but after they work through that they should see the heart of the gospel on display in a visual aid. There is always an invitation to come to Jesus.
- f. Look **Forward**: Anticipate that Jesus is coming back (11:26).
 - i. Nassali (?) The Passover anticipated the Lord's Supper, and the Lord's Supper anticipates the marriage supper of the Lamb.
 - ii. One day He will be present and He will wipe away every tear from our eyes.
 - iii. Every time we take communion we are reminded of what is yet to come.



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2

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2. The *purpose* of the Lord's Supper (11:23-26)

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Exodus 12:14 'Now this day will be a memorial to you, and you shall celebrate it *as* a feast to the LORD; throughout your generations you are to celebrate it *as* a permanent ordinance.

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Exodus 12:24-27 "And you shall observe this event as an ordinance for you and your children forever. ²⁵ "When you enter the land which the LORD will give you, as He has promised, you shall observe this rite.

6

Exodus 12:24-27 ²⁶ "And when your children say to you, 'What does this rite mean to you?' ²⁷ you shall say, 'It is a Passover sacrifice to the LORD who passed over the houses of the sons of Israel in Egypt when He smote the Egyptians, but spared our homes.'" And the people bowed low and worshiped.

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3. Preparing for the Lord's Supper (11:27-34)

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10

b. Look **In**: Examine your heart for hardened apathy, especially toward other Christians (11:27–32).

11

c. Look **Up**: Celebrate your union with Christ (10:16).

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12

d. Look **Around**:

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15