

# ***“The Lord’s Supper”***

**1 CORINTHIANS 11:17-34**

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It would be safe to say that some people here this morning are experts at eating. In fact, it would also be safe to say that some people here this morning are experts at cooking and eating. As a society, we love food. We love good food. We love eating together. We love preparing good food. We love sharing our opinions about food. If I were to ask, “What is the best place to eat here in Madison?” we could discuss that question (and have fun doing it) for the next several hours. Here in our society, we even love watching TV shows about food. As most of you know, we don’t have cable TV at our house, but even without cable, there are dozens upon dozens of shows about food out there – from grilling in the backyard to fine French cuisine and everything in between! Like some of you, I have an app on my phone that knows where I am at all times, and I can hit that little “restaurant” button, and it will show me all of the restaurants in the area, what direction they are from here, it will show me how that restaurant has been rated by other people, I can filter those results to narrow it down to good ratings from people like me (from people who have liked some of the same restaurants that I have liked in the past), that app will tell me whether each restaurant is open right now (and if not, what time it opens tomorrow), it will show me the menu, and when I decide on one, I can hit a button and it will tell me whether to turn right or left when I step out the front door of this building, and then it will show me a photograph of the next intersection where I need to turn to get there! As a society, we have taken a love for food to an entirely new level.

With this in mind, I would like for us to take just a few moments to refresh our minds concerning an act of worship that we still participate in today that involves eating at least a small bit of food. To me it is interesting that in light of how important food is to us, God has incorporated eating into an act of worship. I am referring, of course, to the Lord’s Supper. And as we think about the Lord’s Supper, I would like to ask that we all turn together to what actually appears to be the first written instruction concerning the Lord’s Supper anywhere in the entire Bible. The account is found in the second half of 1 Corinthians 11 (p. 1795). We are looking at a passage, then, that was written only about 22 years after the Lord’s death. If we could think back to what we were doing in 1990, that is the time frame we are talking about here. At this point in 1990, I was getting ready to start my sophomore year Freed-Hardeman University. What were you doing 22 years ago? In some ways, 22 years is a long time, but in other ways, most of us can at least remember something of what we were doing back then. But in that relatively short amount of time, the church in Corinth had managed to mess up the Lord’s Supper to the point that the apostle Paul had to step in with a rather severe correction.

Like we do today, the early church had a tradition of doing a lot of eating together, and this goes all the way back to the very beginning in Acts 2. Over time, however, they had apparently merged their common meal with the Lord's Supper, and it was being abused. People would come to church to eat with their friends, the rich would eat first and get all of the food, and the poor would go away hungry, not even having had the chance to partake of the Lord's memorial. With that in mind, I'd like for us to look together at 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, and for our lesson this morning, I'd like for us to learn from this correction and try to answer the question: What should we be thinking about as we partake of the Lord's Supper? If you will, then, let us notice Paul's words, starting in 1 Corinthians 11:17,

***17 But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse. 18 For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part I believe it. 19 For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you. 20 Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper, 21 for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk. 22 What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? 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 will not praise you.***

***23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which 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 He took the cup also 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.***

***27 Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. 28 But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. 30 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. 31 But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. 32 But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world. 33 So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. 34 If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that you will not come together for judgment. The remaining matters I will arrange when I come.***

As we focus in on these verses over the next twenty minutes or so, I'd like for us to focus on the question: What should we be thinking about as we partake of the Lord's Supper?

- I. **And as we ask that question, we notice in this passage first of all, that WE ARE TO BE MINDFUL OF EACH OTHER.**

And really, this is a disturbing passage. Let's go back to verse 17. It seems to me that the apostle Paul is a little upset. He's going through a laundry list of concerns in this book, one thing after another, he seems to be answering a list of questions they had asked in a letter, and then in response to one of those questions, he says, ***"But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse."*** When I look at that, it appears to me that if things were to continue the way they were going, these people would actually be better off staying home than coming together for worship! Now, for a

preacher, for an apostle, that is a pretty bold comment! But Paul was saying that these people were actually harmed (they were made spiritually weaker) by coming together as a congregation. Again, that is a bold statement, and the reason for it is outlined in the next few verses. As I alluded to earlier, the church in Corinth was divided. In fact, they were so divided that one group muscled in and gorged themselves on the Lord's Supper. As I understand it, that is the meaning of the word "drunk" in this context, the idea of being full – the feeling you have when you get in your car after a visit to Ponderosa – that's how some people were leaving worship. And yet at the same time, the other half of the congregation went away hungry! And there are so many problems with that! First of all, they had twisted the purpose of the Lord's Supper. They had turned it into nothing more than a common meal. And secondly, having turned it into a common meal, they were actually abusing their fellow Christians in the process. I don't know whether we can picture this, but imagine half the congregation dining on steak and lobster and the other half of the congregation sitting over to the side being excluded and actually going hungry. So, we understand why Paul was so upset here.

The church in Corinth, then, had forgotten that the Lord's Supper is described as a **"sharing."** In fact, that reference comes in the previous chapter. Just go back and notice 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, ***"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? Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread."*** If you are reading from the King James Version, you might have noticed the word **"communion"** here. The Lord's Supper is a **"sharing"** or a **"communion."** When we partake of the Lord's Supper, then, we are sharing, we are communing with one another, and so we are not to just think of ourselves, but we are to think of each other. As we partake of the Lord's Supper, then, we need to thank God for our spiritual family. We are to thank God for the unity that we have within this congregation. We are to thank God for the relationships that we have with one another in the church.

But what if a fellow Christian is really getting on our nerves? How do we handle that? I want to point out an interesting little phrase down in verse 23. As Paul describes the original Lord's Supper, notice how he identifies it. He refers to what the Lord did, ***"in the night in which He was betrayed."*** To me, that is significant. Paul is addressing this church where people could not get along, and he makes a point here: You people are messing up this memorial because you cannot get along, but the Lord originally shared that memorial meal with the very man who would betray Him just a few hours later! As He established this meal as a memorial, He knew that He was sharing with Judas. And if the Lord could do that, then certainly we should also be able to get along with our own brothers and sisters in the church. Jesus knew exactly what was coming, and yet He sat down and ate dinner anyway. Paul, then, is saying: You guys need to do the same thing – you need to get together and sit down, you need to work it out and share!

While we are on this passage, I do need to address verse 22 – Is Paul condemning all fellowship dinners? No, he was not, but in light of the abuse in Corinth, Paul was basically saying: You don't come to worship to stuff your faces! That is not the point of our assemblies together! But rather, as far as the Lord's Supper is concerned, it is a memorial, not a meal. The purpose of the Lord's Supper is not to satisfy our physical hunger. Some have used verse 22 to outlaw the eating of anything inside a church building, "Ah! Paul says that you need to eat at home!" I would point out, though, that the church in Corinth did not even have a church building! I would also point out that if you took this verse to its logical conclusion by those who use it in this way, that drinking would also need to be condemned. You couldn't even have a drinking fountain in the church building. After all, Paul said, "Do you not have houses in which to eat and DRINK?" But that is not the point of this passage. The point of this passage is that we need to be mindful (and at least considerate) of each other as we partake of the Lord's Supper.

Part of the beauty of the Lord's memorial is that Christians around the world partake of it together on the first day of every week. As this morning dawned in New Zealand, our Christian friends got up to attend worship. They partook of the Lord's Supper first, followed by those in Australia – including our missionaries, Brett and Joanne Rutherford, and the congregation there in Tasmania. At the same time, they were joined by our brothers and sisters meeting in secret in China, and then by those in Thailand and the millions in India. The sun then rose on the Middle East, and Africa, and Europe – Michael and Florence's family and friends in Ghana. As the earth continued to rotate on its axis, the first day of the week sped across the islands of the Atlantic before arriving in North and South America. We are about to partake in just a few moments, and before this day is over, our brothers and sisters in Alaska and Hawaii and throughout the Pacific will also partake of this very simple memorial meal. Paul is correct, then, when he refers to the Lord's Supper as a ***"sharing"*** or a ***"communion."*** We share this meal with our brothers and sisters all around the world. We are mindful of each other and thank God – what a blessing it is to be able to participate in such a powerful and meaningful event!

**II. There is something else we need to be thinking about as we partake – in fact it is the main point of the memorial – and that is, WE ARE TO BE THINKING ABOUT THE LORD'S SACRIFICE ON THE CROSS.**

As human beings, we have a tendency to forget things – in fact, sometimes we forget what we were looking for from the time we get up off the couch and walk into the kitchen. As humans, we forget, and so the apostle Paul quotes the Lord as he says two times that the Lord's Supper is to be done, ***"In remembrance of Me."*** In my short lifetime, I have seen many memorials – statues, and plaques, and headstones, and giant obelisks like the Washington Monument, beautiful buildings like the Lincoln Memorial. All of these are meaningful and very touching in their own way, and yet we know that the world's greatest memorial was not designed by an architect or built out of marble. It is not a monument that will crumble with time or a statue that needs to be polished and maintained, but the world's greatest monument is a very simple meal – originated in the mind of God and personally explained by God's only Son who was crucified the next morning for the sins of the world.

The memorial includes the most basic and universal food and drink on the face of this earth – unleavened bread and grape juice. Where on earth can we not find those two elements? From deserts to mountaintops to ships in the middle of the ocean and even on the first manned craft to land on the face of the moon, these are two of the most basic foods known to mankind and can either be grown or very easily preserved and transported. As Christians, our worship is incredibly simple. As Paul explained, the bread represents the Lord's body, and as we know from other passages, unleavened bread in particular has a rich history with God's people, going all the way back to the escape from Egypt after the ten plagues under Moses. On the night before they left Egypt, the Lord told the people to make bread (without letting it rise), and they were basically to eat it on the run as they escaped from slavery. They had to make that meal "to go," we might say. And from that point on, the Passover meal was eaten to anticipate the arrival of the coming Messiah – it looked forward to the time when the people would truly be redeemed. I have read that in later years, many Jewish families would actually set an empty place for the Messiah as they celebrated the Passover meal. And so as Jesus and the apostles are eating the Passover, and as Jesus takes the bread and the juice and applies it to Himself, it would have had a huge impact. As Paul referred to earlier in this book (in 1 Corinthians 5), Christ is ***"our Passover."*** He is the Passover Lamb, sacrificed for the sins of the world, and the bread represents His body. Just as the bread is unleavened, so also, Christ is without sin. And so as we eat the bread, we remember the Lord's body, we remember His suffering and death. We remember how God became human for us. We remember how He left His throne in heaven and came to be born into a poor family and to be placed in a feeding trough. We remember His sinless life. We remember the words He spoke. We remember the miracles He performed. We remember that the Lord's body took the punishment that we deserve. When Jesus said,

***“This is My body, which is for you,”*** we should know that the word ***“for”*** is a word meaning “for the sake of” or “instead of.” In other words, ***“This is My body, which is instead of you.”*** We should have been there, but Jesus took our place.

In a similar way, when we drink the grape juice, we remember that Jesus paid a debt with His blood that we could never pay. We remember that Jesus shed His blood so that we can live. We remember His blood that was poured out for the forgiveness of our sins. As Paul said in Ephesians 1:7-8, ***“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished upon us.”*** The Lord’s Supper, therefore, is a memorial. It is something that helps us remember, even though we were not actually there. We remember the most significant event in the history of the world. It is a simple memorial. Every culture can participate. It is not a stone that we look at, but it is a memorial that we touch, and taste, and see, and smell. We can be especially thankful that we have a Christian sister here at this congregation who bakes our communion bread fresh on a regular basis. And it’s even whole wheat! I’ve been to churches where they have those Matzo crackers from the grocery store, and when they come around they have a little layer of black fuzz on them – they’ve been sitting in the church basement for years. Not cool at all! So, let us be thankful! And as we take the bread and the fruit of the vine, we hear the Lord say, ***“Take, eat, this is My body and my blood.”*** As we participate in the Lord’s Supper, then, we are to think about the death of Jesus Christ.

III. **There is something else we need to consider as we partake of the Lord’s Supper – as we continue looking at this passage, we find in the last little section here that WE ARE TO THINK ABOUT OURSELVES.**

As Paul says in verse 28, each one ***“must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup.”*** And with this, we find ourselves in some very serious verses, starting with the warning (in verse 27), that if we ***“eat the bread or drink[s] the cup in an unworthy manner,”*** we shall be ***“guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord.”*** There are some very tender-hearted Christians who think that this means that if there is any sin in their lives at all, that they cannot partake of the Lord’s Supper. Not long after I began preaching, I started to notice that one particular Christian man was not partaking of the Lord’s Supper – he simply allowed the bread and the grape juice to pass by, and so after a few weeks, I asked him about it – I was concerned. And in response to that concern, the man said, “I am not worthy!” So with that concern in mind, we turned to this passage, and I pointed out that Paul was not talking about being worthy to partake of the Supper, because if we had to be worthy, none of us could partake! In fact, that is the whole point of the Supper! If I were “worthy,” then I would not need the Supper in the first place! In reality, there is not a single accountable person anywhere on this earth who “deserves” what Jesus did on the cross. We are certainly not “worthy” of it. Notice, though, what Paul actually says – we are not to partake of the Supper in an ***“unworthy manner.”*** We are not worthy of it, but our manner of partaking of it needs to be worthy. In other words, we need to be mindful of each other, we need to be thinking about what the Lord has done for us, and we need to look very carefully at ourselves. We are to ***“examine”*** ourselves. We are to turn our focus inward.

And maybe I need to emphasize something here: This is not a time for us to examine other people. This is not a time for us to think about how other people need to be doing better. This is not a time to think about how so and so is a hypocrite, or about how that person over there needs to get his or her life straightened out. But this is a time for examining ourselves. Many years ago, I noticed that two Christian women weren’t partaking of the Lord’s Supper, and they came storming up to me after the service, they pulled me into a classroom, and they said, “The young man who led the prayer thanked God for the nice day we were having, but he failed to thank God for the bread, so we refused to eat it, and now, Baxter, you need to serve it to us the right way!”

Well, at that point I had to decide how to handle that situation. I wanted to say, “You hypocritical little whiners! You’re the reason why a lot of churches don’t have preachers anymore!” But I controlled myself to the best of my ability, we studied this passage, and then I told them that if they wanted to partake of the Lord’s Supper they could stay longer and take care of it between the two of them right there in that room.” Well, that obviously didn’t go over very well, that was not exactly what they wanted to hear, but that was about all I could do with a clean conscience that day. The point is: The Lord’s Supper is not a time to be critical of what someone did or didn’t say or of what someone did or didn’t wear while leading the prayer, but the Lord’s Supper is a time to look very carefully at ourselves on the inside and to humbly fall on our faces weeping as we kneel down before the throne of God. As Paul says, we are to examine ourselves. We do not eat at this table because we have a right to be here; rather, we come to this table because we have been invited by the Son of God. We are not worthy – that is the point!

Do we really appreciate what the Lord has done for us personally? In light of the cross, in light of the cost of sin, is there something that I personally need to work on during the coming week? As I think about the Lord’s death, burial, and resurrection, am I thinking back to my own death, burial, and resurrection, when I first obeyed the gospel? How am I doing with that commitment that I made so many years ago? Am I holding firm to my confession that Jesus Christ is the Son of God? Am I personally thankful for what the Lord has done for me?

The apostle Paul goes on to talk about sickness, and death, and judgment, and condemnation. We may not fully understand the kind of punishment that Paul is talking about here (whether it is spiritual or physical or some combination of both), but we do know that it is not good to partake of the Lord’s Supper in an **“unworthy manner.”** Otherwise, it is possible for us to be found guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, and that is not good! But again, the solution is not avoiding the Lord’s Supper – the solution is to look inside ourselves as we examine ourselves and as we think very carefully about the manner in which we are partaking of the Lord’s memorial meal.

### **Conclusion:**

We started this morning by talking about how much we enjoy eating. You know, one part of enjoying a meal comes from knowing how that meal was prepared. Sometimes we enjoy knowing where the food came from and who fixed it for us and what the story is behind it. We enjoy eating something from a small family farm or maybe something our kids grew for us in their own little section of the family garden. As we think about that, and as we close, I would point out that no meal in world history has gone through more planning, more work, more sacrifice, and more preparation than the Lord’s Supper. There is no meal with more unique or more meaningful ingredients than the Lord’s Supper. And because of this, it is no wonder that there is no meal with more significant consequences.

This morning we have studied the Lord’s Supper, and I believe we have answered the question: What should we be thinking about when we partake of it. We need to be mindful of each other, we are to think about what the Lord has done for us, and we need to look very carefully at ourselves.

As we close, I would point out that when the Lord Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper, He referred to His **“...blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins.”** His blood was shed so that our sins can be forgiven. I find it interesting that that exact phrase **“...for forgiveness of sins...”** is found at least one other time in the Scriptures. It is found in Acts 2. Peter was preaching on the first day of the church. He told those who were listening that they were personally responsible for killing Jesus. At that point, they

interrupted Peter's lesson. The Bible says in Acts 2:37-38, ***"Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?' Peter said to them, 'Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'"*** If the blood of Jesus was shed ***"for the forgiveness of sins,"*** and if we are to be baptized ***"for the forgiveness of sins,"*** then it seems to me that baptism is the point where we come into contact with the blood of Jesus Christ. If you need the prayers of this congregation, we would invite you to write your concerns down and let us know. But if you are ready to obey the gospel, if you are ready to turn away from sin, if you are ready to confess Christ as the Son of God, and if you are ready to be buried with Christ in baptism, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: [fourlakeschurch@gmail.com](mailto:fourlakeschurch@gmail.com)