

# THE LORD'S SUPPER

## 1 CORINTHIANS 11:17–34

### *Introduction*

The Lord's Supper is one of the ordinances of the church. It is crucial for believers to understand how it is and is not to be observed. This passage is a thorough study on the subject.

- I. Paul rebuked the way the Corinthians were celebrating the Lord's Supper (v. 17).
- II. The corruption of the Lord's Supper (vv. 18-22).
- III. The real meaning of the Lord's Supper (vv. 23-26).
- IV. The severe consequences of partaking unworthily of the Lord's Supper (vv. 27-30).
- V. The right approach to the Lord's Supper (vv. 31-34).

### **I. *1 Corinthians 11:17 Celebration of the Lord's Supper***

Paul rebuked the way the Corinthians were celebrating the Lord's Supper. He had praised them for their diligence in keeping the traditions or customs of the church (v. 2). But in dealing with the Lord's Supper, he declared in no uncertain terms: "I have no praise for you." The word "directives" (*parangello*) means command. Note how forceful Paul is: "In the following directives [the Lord's Supper] I have no praise for you." His forcefulness stresses the awesome importance of the Lord's Supper and the absolute necessity to celebrate it as it should be celebrated.

Paul abruptly states: "You come together to celebrate the Lord's Supper not for the better, not to edify yourselves by remembering the Lord's death; but you come together for the worse, to tear yourselves down."

### **II. *1 Corinthians 11:18–22 Corruption of the Lord's Supper***

The Corinthians were tragically abusing the Lord's Supper. The abuses may seem strange to some churches today because they simply partake of a bread crumb and a small glass of wine or grape juice to celebrate the Lord's Supper. However, as stated in the introductory note, the Corinthians observed the Lord's Supper with a full-fledged meal or *Love Feast*. There were *four abuses*, some of which are very applicable and speak very directly to the churches of every generation.

1. There were divisions and cliques within the church which corrupted the Lord's Supper (v. 18-19). When divisions, cliques, factions and parties exist, the spirit of a church is in disorder. Minds and hearts are not upon the Lord nor at peace with the Lord or with the Lord's people. Disturbance, pain, anger, rumour, gossip, pride, selfishness, misunderstanding and misrepresentation always prevail when there are divisions and cliques within a church.
-

Note: Paul said he only believed part of what he had heard. He knew full well how matters begin to grow and become surrounded with rumours, innuendoes and exaggeration. However there was truth to what he had heard, and he knew it, and the church must correct it.

Note another matter that is of crucial importance for genuine believers within the church. Divisions and cliques within the church do not catch God off guard nor by surprise. On the contrary, God allows the divisions and cliques for a very special reason: the division causes the genuine believer to stand out ever so much more. People who are divisive and cliquish cause the love and truth of genuine believers to shine ever so brightly. In the words of Scripture:

*1 Cor 11:19* No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval.

**Thought 1.** This point is a great encouragement to the minister of God and to genuine believers as they face division, cliques and opposition from the carnal and unsaved in the church.

Note the warning in this point as well. Any person who finds himself in a group that is divisive or cliquish stands in terrible danger. Divisiveness and cliquishness are proofs that a person is not genuine. He must repent and commit his life to the love and mission of the Lord (cp. 1 Cor. 15:33).

*1 Cor 1:10* I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.

*1 Cor 3:3* You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarrelling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?

*Eph 4:3* Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.

*Phil 1:27* Whatever happens, conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ. Then, whether I come and see you or only hear about you in my absence, I will know that you stand firm in one spirit, contending as one man for the faith of the gospel.

*1 Pet 3:8* Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.

2. There was self-deception which corrupted the Lord's Supper (v. 20). Very simply, the Corinthians were only deceiving themselves in coming together and partaking of the cup and the bread. They may have thought they were celebrating the Lord's Supper, but they were not; they were utterly deceived. What they were doing was *not remembering and honouring* the Lord. It was utterly impossible to have a divisive and cliquish spirit and honour the Lord. Their meeting together was utterly meaningless and useless to the Lord.

**Gal 6:3** *If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.*

**Gal 6:7** *Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.*

**James 1:22** *Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.*

**James 1:26** *If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.*

**1 John 3:7** *Dear children, do not let anyone lead you astray. He who does what is right is righteous, just as he is righteous.*

**Rev 3:16-17** *So, because you are lukewarm — neither hot nor cold — I am about to spit you out of my mouth. You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.*

**Psa 36:2** *For in his own eyes he flatters himself too much to detect or hate his sin.*

3. There was selfishness and neglect of others which corrupted the Lord's Supper (v. 21). When the early church came together for the *Love Feast*, everyone brought all the food they could. This provided plenty for everyone, including the poor and the slaves who would not be able to bring much. The whole idea was to have a common meal where everyone shared:

- the rich and poor
- the upper and lower class
- the free and enslaved
- the male and female
- the Jew and Gentile
- the adult and child
- the educated and uneducated

However, the Corinthian church had begun to abuse the Supper. Instead of sharing, everyone sat off in their own little group of friends and shared their food only among themselves. The result was tragic:

=> Some were neglected, having little if anything to eat. This would be true in particular with the slaves.

=> Some were indulging, acting as gluttons.

=> Some were treating the affair as a social gathering, drinking off to the side and becoming drunk.

There was no real Christian fellowship or love whatsoever being experienced. And although the church was partaking of the bread and the cup, it was not celebrating the Lord's Supper. What they were doing was totally meaningless and useless. What they were celebrating was a feast to the evil spirit of selfishness and indulgence, not to the Lord.

4. There was the abuse of the sanctity of the church and the shaming of the poor which corrupted the Lord's Supper. Note that this verse is a series of questions that answer themselves and should stir conviction within the heart of the guilty.

- => Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? The church is not the place where we are to eat and drink. It is the place of worship.
- => Are you not abusing the church and shaming the poor through your division, cliques, selfishness, indulgence, and hoarding? Of course you are!
- => "What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not!"

### **III. 1 Corinthians 11:23–26 Meaning of the Lord's Supper**

The real meaning of the Lord's Supper. Paul clearly said that he had a special revelation from Christ regarding the Lord's Supper. What he received from the Lord is what he now shares. (Cp. Acts 18:9; 22:18; 23:11; 27:23-25; Gal. 1:12; 2:2; 2 Cor. 12:7 for references to the special revelations Paul received of the Lord.) Note that Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper on the very night that He was betrayed.

1. The meaning of the bread and wine: The Catechism of the Catholic Church gives us the the correct meaning of the sacred bread and wine, and about the presence of Jesus Christ in the sacred bread and wine. (See CCC 1365, 1374 to 1381).

1365 Because it is the memorial of Christ's Passover, the Eucharist is also a sacrifice. the sacrificial character of the Eucharist is manifested in the very words of institution: "This is my body which is given for you" and "This cup which is poured out for you is the New Covenant in my blood." In the Eucharist Christ gives us the very body which he gave up for us on the cross, the very blood which he "poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins."

1374 The mode of Christ's presence under the Eucharistic species is unique. It raises the Eucharist above all the sacraments as "the perfection of the spiritual life and the end to which all the sacraments tend." In the most blessed sacrament of the Eucharist "the body and blood, together with the soul and divinity, of our Lord Jesus Christ and, therefore, the whole Christ is truly, really, and substantially contained." "This presence is called 'real' — by which is not intended to exclude the other types of presence as if they could not be 'real' too, but because it is presence in the fullest sense: that is to say, it is a substantial presence by which Christ, God and man, makes himself wholly and entirely present."

1375 It is by the conversion of the bread and wine into Christ's body and blood that Christ becomes present in this sacrament. The Church Fathers strongly affirmed the faith of the Church in the efficacy of the Word of Christ and of the action of the Holy Spirit to bring about this conversion. Thus St. John Chrysostom declares: It is not man that causes the things offered to become the Body and Blood of Christ, but he who was crucified for us, Christ himself. The priest, in the role of Christ, pronounces these words, but their power and grace are God's. This is my body, he says. This word transforms the things offered and St. Ambrose says about this conversion: Be

convinced that this is not what nature has formed, but what the blessing has consecrated. The power of the blessing prevails over that of nature, because by the blessing nature itself is changed.... Could not Christ's word, which can make from nothing what did not exist, change existing things into what they were not before? It is no less a feat to give things their original nature than to change their nature.

1376 The Council of Trent summarizes the Catholic faith by declaring: "Because Christ our Redeemer said that it was truly his body that he was offering under the species of bread, it has always been the conviction of the Church of God, and this holy Council now declares again, that by the consecration of the bread and wine there takes place a change of the whole substance of the bread into the substance of the body of Christ our Lord and of the whole substance of the wine into the substance of his blood. This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and properly called transubstantiation."

1377 The Eucharistic presence of Christ begins at the moment of the consecration and endures as long as the Eucharistic species subsist. Christ is present whole and entire in each of the species and whole and entire in each of their parts, in such a way that the breaking of the bread does not divide Christ.

1378 Worship of the Eucharist. In the liturgy of the Mass we express our faith in the real presence of Christ under the species of bread and wine by, among other ways, genuflecting or bowing deeply as a sign of adoration of the Lord. "The Catholic Church has always offered and still offers to the sacrament of the Eucharist the cult of adoration, not only during Mass, but also outside of it, reserving the consecrated hosts with the utmost care, exposing them to the solemn veneration of the faithful, and carrying them in procession."

1379 The tabernacle was first intended for the reservation of the Eucharist in a worthy place so that it could be brought to the sick and those absent outside of Mass. As faith in the real presence of Christ in his Eucharist deepened, the Church became conscious of the meaning of silent adoration of the Lord present under the Eucharistic species. It is for this reason that the tabernacle should be located in an especially worthy place in the church and should be constructed in such a way that it emphasizes and manifests the truth of the real presence of Christ in the Blessed Sacrament.

1380 It is highly fitting that Christ should have wanted to remain present to his Church in this unique way. Since Christ was about to take his departure from his own in his visible form, he wanted to give us his sacramental presence; since he was about to offer himself on the cross to save us, he wanted us to have the memorial of the love with which he loved us "to the end," even to the giving of his life. In his Eucharistic presence he remains mysteriously in our midst as the one who loved us and gave himself up for us, and he remains under signs that express and communicate this love:

The Church and the world have a great need for Eucharistic worship. Jesus awaits us in this sacrament of love. Let us not refuse the time to go to meet him in adoration, in contemplation full of faith, and open to making amends for the serious offenses and crimes of the world. Let our adoration never cease.

1381 “That in this sacrament are the true Body of Christ and his true Blood is something that ‘cannot be apprehended by the senses,’ says St. Thomas, ‘but only by faith, which relies on divine authority.’ For this reason, in a commentary on Luke 22:19 (‘This is my body which is given for you.’), St. Cyril says: ‘Do not doubt whether this is true, but rather receive the words of the Saviour in faith, for since he is the truth, he cannot lie.’”

*John 6:53-56* Jesus said to [the Jews], “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; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me, and I in him.”

- a. Note the words “for you.” The word “for” (huper) points to the substitutionary nature of Jesus’ death. He died for us, as our substitute.

*Gal 3:13* Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.”

*Heb 2:9* But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honour because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

*Heb 9:28* So Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him.

*1 Pet 2:24* He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

*1 Pet 3:18* For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit.

- b. “Do this in remembrance of me.” This means much more than just recalling the death of Christ. It means to actively stir up one’s mind and to meditate upon the person of Jesus Christ. Christ says to remember Him, not just one aspect of His Person and work. The believer is to *actively meditate* upon Christ.
2. The meaning of the cup: again, note the exact words of the Lord.
  - a. “This cup is the new covenant [diatheke], in my blood.” The idea is that the old covenant of the Old Testament is being set aside and God is establishing a new

covenant with His people. The *basis* of the new covenant is *the blood of Jesus Christ*, not the blood of bulls and goats.

**Heb 9:13-15** *The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance — now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant.*

- b. “In remembrance of me.” This is repeated to stress the point that the Lord’s Supper has one purpose and only one purpose: to focus attention upon the Lord. The Lord’s people are to centre their minds upon Him and Him alone. The celebration of the Lord’s Supper is not to be a time for fellowshiping and feasting.
3. The reason for observing the Lord’s Supper: note the word “proclaim” (katangelo). It means to preach, declare, announce, show, the Lord’s Supper is both a picture and sermon which proclaims...
  - the Lord’s death
  - the Lord’s return

The point is this: Christ died for us that we might live eternally with Him. Therefore, His death pictures both what He has done for us as well as what He is going to do for us when He returns. His death is a picture of both our past and present redemption as well as our future redemption when we shall be conformed to His image of perfection.

**Rom 5:9** *Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God’s wrath through him!*

**1 Pet 1:18** *For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers.*

**1 John 1:7** *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.*

**Rev 1:5** *And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood.*

**Phil 3:20-21** *But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.*

**1 Th 4:16-18** *For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together*

*with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.*

**Titus 2:13** *While we wait for the blessed hope – the glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour, Jesus Christ.*

#### **IV. 1 Corinthians 11:27–30 Consequences of Unworthy Participation**

The severe consequences or chastisement for partaking of the Lord's Supper unworthily. What does it mean to partake of the supper unworthily? Paul is speaking directly to the Corinthians; so whatever their sins were is bound to be what Paul means by unworthily. The Corinthians were guilty of partaking of the Lord's Supper with...

- a spirit of division (v. 18).
- a spirit of heresy (factions, parties, cliques, v. 19).
- a spirit of self-deception (v. 20).
- a spirit of selfishness and indulgence (v. 21).
- a spirit of drunkenness (v. 21).
- a spirit of neglecting the poor (v. 21).
- a spirit of irreverence and carelessness in protecting the sanctity of the church (v. 22).
- a spirit of unthoughtfulness and carelessness in approaching the Lord's Supper.

Very frankly, the above list seems to indicate that having sin within one's heart and life is what is meant by partaking unworthily. Certainly, if we eat the bread and drink the cup with *unconfessed sin* in our hearts and lives, how can we be counted worthy? Our only worthiness is Jesus Christ, and the only time we are counted worthy by Him is when we are walking...

- in constant confession.
- in constant repentance to Him.
- in constant praise of His mercy, grace, Person and work.

We have no righteousness of our own, so the only conceivable time we could be counted worthy would be when we are walking in constant fellowship with Him. And constant fellowship means actively thinking upon and talking with Him through confession, repentance, praise and request.

There are three consequences for partaking of the Lord's Supper unworthily, that is, with unconfessed sin in one's heart and life.

1. A person becomes guilty of the Lord's death (v. 27). The idea is that the person shall be held accountable, for he is guilty of sin against the Lord Himself. He...
  - insults Christ
  - offends Christ
  - tramples Christ underfoot
  - counts the death of Christ as meaningless
  - insults the Spirit of grace



**Heb 10:29** *How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace?*

2. A person condemns himself if he does not examine his heart for unconfessed sin (v. 28-29). The severity of the consequence is so serious that a person must examine himself before partaking of the Lord's Supper. He needs to make sure he has a clean heart by confessing and repenting of any known sin (v. 28).

The word "judgment" (krima) means to judge, to condemn. It does not mean to damn or to doom to eternal hell and punishment. The person is assumed to be a real believer who is guilty of sin, not an unbeliever who is to be damned to hell. The actual judgment upon the believer who lives in sin is covered in the next point.

The word "recognizing" (diaknno) means to discriminate, to distinguish, to discern. The person who eats the bread and drinks the cup unworthily just fails to think about what he is doing. He fails to discriminate and discern the seriousness of his act. If he thought about the matter, he would not partake of the Lord's Supper with unconfessed sin in his life, for such irreverence of the body and blood of the Lord stirs the judgment of God.

**Lam 3:40** *Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the LORD.*

**2 Cor 13:5** *Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you – unless, of course, you fail the test?*

**Gal 6:4** *Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else.*

3. A person is disciplined and chastened by the Lord (v. 30). The Corinthians were so rank in their abuse of the Lord's Supper that God had to act in severe discipline. His discipline included both sickness and death. This fact is stated so simply and straightforwardly that it has to be taken for what it says unless the Scripture is to be twisted. There is nothing in the context that even suggests that weak and sickly death are symbolic. When dealing with God's discipline or chastisement of His people, three things need to be kept in mind.

=> God does discipline His child. He disciplines His child because He loves him (Heb. 12:5-13).

=> God disciplines His child to prevent the child from destroying himself and hurting and damaging others through serious sin (v. 29, 31).

=> God knows exactly what kind of discipline will most likely awaken his child to repentance and confession.

=> God knows when a believer should be taken on home to heaven. God alone knows when a *sinning believer has gone so far in sin* that he is never going to repent. At that point,

the believer's task upon earth is done; he will never again have a testimony for Christ upon earth, nor be of any real value to anyone else. As stated, only God knows when a believer who is living in sin reaches such a point. When he does, he is ready to be taken home. His damage to Christ and to loved ones and to the world have gone far enough.

Apparently, some of the Corinthian believers had reached the point of no return, so God took them on home to be with Him. (See *Judgment*, I Jn. 5:16. Also see 1 Cor. 3:13-15; 3:17; 5:3-5.)

**John 15:2** *"He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful."*

**1 Cor 11:32** *When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world.*

**Heb 12:5-8** *And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons.*

**Rev 3:19** *Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent.*

**Deu 8:5** *Know then in your heart that as a man disciplines his son, so the LORD your God disciplines you.*

**Job 33:19** *Or a man may be chastened on a bed of pain with constant distress in his bones.*

**Psa 94:12** *Blessed is the man you discipline, O LORD, the man you teach from your law.*

**Prov 3:11** *My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline and do not resent his rebuke.*

**Jer 10:24** *Correct me, LORD, but only with justice — not in your anger, lest you reduce me to nothing.*

## **V. 1 Corinthians 11:31–34 The Right Approach to the Lord's Supper**

The right approach to the Lord's Supper. Note four points.

1. Approach the Lord's Supper by judging yourself, that is, by examining yourself. We are to examine and make sure we are not living in sin or carrying some known and unconfessed sin in our hearts. We are certainly not to partake of the Lord's Supper if we are living in known sin.
2. Accept the discipline, the chastisement of the Lord. Confess and repent, turn from your life of sin, knowing that God disciplines or chastens you out of love. He

disciplines you to keep you from being condemned with the world. This apparently refers to the final judgment. The person who continuously lives in known sin is apparently running the risk of being judged with the unbelievers of the world.

3. Serve one another. Stop acting selfishly and stop indulging yourselves. Share and demonstrate love by putting others first.
4. Do not bring judgment upon yourself. Straighten your life out; sin no more. Change what you have been doing. Eat at home, and come together for the Lord's Supper. Do everything decently and in order.

*2 Cor 4:17* For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

*Heb 12:11* No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

*Job 5:17* "Blessed is the man whom God corrects; so do not despise the discipline of the Almighty."

*Job 23:10* But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold.

*Job 34:31* "Suppose a man says to God, 'I am guilty but will offend no more.'"

*Psa 119:67* Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word.

*Jonah 2:2* He said: "In my distress I called to the LORD, and he answered me. From the depths of the grave I called for help, and you listened to my cry." ■