

Sermon: The Lord's Supper

Text: I Corinthians 11:17-34 ESV

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Inroduction: The Lord must weep over divisions (schisms) within the Church. He must be troubled over his own people denying each other's communion because of all the various interpretations.

The main text in the Corinthian letter this morning is the earliest record of teaching about the Lord's Supper, even before the gospel accounts. The Lord's Supper has been a source of controversy within the Church for years. Early in the Church's history this was the case and continues to be the case (See *How To Study I Corinthians*, by Gettys, p.88ff), but it need not be.

A part of the early controversy found in the Corinthian church is outlined in our text: **I Corinthians 11:17-22 ESV** 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 Lord's Supper is no time for recognition of who is more important among us. We are all servants!

As far as various interpretations, church fathers, Ignatius and Irenaeus, believed that while the bread and wine remained bread and wine, those who partook of the supper received a mysterious physical union with the living, spiritual influence from Christ.

It is at the end of the 6th century (Gregory I, AD 590) that the Lord's Supper (later to be called "the Mass" in the R.C. Church) became the central part of the service and something done by a priest. **Talk of positioning of table – Owosso.**

In 831 a French abbot began teaching what is known today to be the doctrine of *transubstantiation*. This belief was the bread and wine were permanently changed into the body and blood of Christ when the priest consecrated the elements during the mass (the miracle of this transformation is designated by the tinkling of a bell).

The Lutheran Church at the Reformation changed their view of the Lord's Supper to what is called *consubstantiation*. This means the bread and wine stay the same, yet the body and blood of Christ are somehow so inseparably united with the elements that they are the body and blood. Luther believed Christ's words "This is my body" to be literal.

Those following the teachings of John Calvin believe with us that as the Hebrews writer says: **Hebrews 7:27 ESV** ²⁷ He has no need, like those high priests, to offer sacrifices daily, first for his own sins and then for those of the people, since he did this once for all when he offered up himself. - **redundant**

These outward symbols of bread and wine represent Christ's atonement. "The Lord's Supper is a memorial and a witness to what He has done and is doing for us, and of what we may do for Him."

Even today within the Restoration Movement Churches we have division over how one should partake, i.e. one cup (OC) and one loaf as opposed to individual pieces of unleavened bread and individual cups.

We should not be surprised by all the confusion in John's gospel for all of his using of metaphor and simile. No one would confuse Jesus with literally being a door or gate, nor would they believe Him to literally be a light. John puts the Lord's Supper before the Passover meal unlike the other gospel writers who make it a part of the meal. John was more interested in symbolism than the actual chronology - more interested in the Spirit than the flesh.

John 6:63 ESV ⁶³ 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. - **comment**

Looking back to the original Lord's Supper, we must understand that within that first supper and in every gathering today there is the potential of betrayal (**Judas**) and denial (**Peter**) as well as personal ambition (those who want places of importance).

It seems to me the text helps us to understand three facets about the Lord's Supper.
I. The Lord's Supper Is a Memory Aid... a spiritual meal, not a physical one. AND there needs to be proper preparation for the Lord's Supper.

Mentally – thinking about spiritual things, blocking out earthly problems and concerns (time, meal, afternoon activities)

Attitudinally – the NT instructions for bringing offerings should also hold true here – for communion. **Matthew 5:23-24 ESV** 23 So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

I believe at the Last Supper, Jesus may have already forgiven Judas and Peter for what they were about to do.

Spiritually – thinking of the way the Holy Spirit lives within us, we remember Christ's sacrifice and with God's help begin to understand the immense advantage and responsibility we have as His children.

Pictures are an aid to memory. Old photo albums are valuable in helping us to remember. There is however a huge difference between bread and wine and Kodak film. The Holy Spirit works with us to help in this remembering. He helps us remember the costliness of God's grace. He is an ever-present Person who is there to be an ever-increasing presence in our lives. A memory is sometimes described as a recollection of someone or something no longer here. **BUT JESUS IS NOT GONE!**

William Barclay wrote: "He is a presence to be met and a person to be experienced" and known.

II. The Lord's Supper Is a Proclamation and Witness.

I Corinthians 11:23-26 ESV 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 Supper should be a witness of a current faith of our **DELIVERANCE FROM SIN AND DEATH TO SIN** and a future hope of **REDEMPTION AND COMPLETE RECONCILIATION**, because then we will be face-to-face when Jesus comes to partake again in His Kingdom.

Bruce M. Metzger recalls what the Last Supper must have been like in his book *"The New Testament, it's background, growth, and content."* (See pages 121ff)

As you recall, Jesus sent Peter and John into Jerusalem to prepare the Passover.

- Passover lamb
- Fruit paste
- Cinnamon sticks
- Unleavened bread
- Bitter herbs
- Red wine

This was an ancient and solemn ritual commemorating the deliverance of Israel from Egyptian bondage. It involved a common meal and a leader who would recall to those present the mighty acts of God in the nation's history.

It was in this context, we believe that Jesus introduces the Lord's Supper to his disciples. Jesus lifted the platter of unleavened bread and spoke the ancient formula in Aramaic: "This is the bread of affliction which our fathers ate in the land of Egypt. Let everyone who hungers come and eat; let everyone who is in need come and eat the Passover meal."

Jesus then took the Passover loaf, blessed and broke it, distributing it to those present. Jesus then said words that went far beyond what were customary. "Take, eat; this is my body which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

At the close of the meal there was a "cup of blessing." This, too, was reinterpreted for our use when Jesus said: "Drink of it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me."

What about the FREQUENCY OF THE LORD'S SUPPER - comment

(Because of the importance placed on the church community's love for each other in the face of persecution once a week or more often seemed a long time – like being away on a trip)

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. There is no command here, but certainly a model for us.

At the Passover, Jesus and his disciples would have sung antiphonally [Psalms 113-118](#).

It was the practice of the Jews to stay after the meal and discuss the miracles which God had performed and would still do among his people. It is a shame our culture is so hurried that we get on edge if things go too slowly. We associate shortness of time and brevity with a good worship service. Maybe some day we will be able to relax and rearrange our priorities to savor this time with our God and each other. Maybe when our love grows.

John tells us of how Jesus was crucified exactly at the same time as the Passover lambs were being sacrificed. Jesus replaced forever the need for further blood sacrifices. Also at the same time that Jesus was pierced and “out flowed blood and water,” the altar was being washed down and from the outside wall of a temple out flowed blood and water. They did not even realize there was no further need to celebrate the Passover at the time. **BECAUSE A GREATER LIBERATION HAD TAKEN PLACE.**

III. The Lord’s Supper Is for the Church (it is not for everyone).

Illus. Jennifer, my daughter, when she was 7 wanted to be baptized so she could take communion. I always try to ask why a person wants to be baptized, or even why a person might want to marry. **Love has to be the reason!**

If you do not have a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ the Lord, you have no business taking part in His supper. It is a meaningless meal among strangers.

The Lord’s Supper is designed to be spiritual sustenance for the follower of Jesus, not a physical meal. Just as certainly as death follows not eating physical food, spiritual dying and even death will follow a long absence from the Lord’s table. The Lord’s table is no place for the unsaved.

We practice open communion (explain), but you need to be aware of the following verses.

I Corinthians 11:27-34 ESV 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.[a] 31 But if we judged[b] ourselves truly, we would not be judged. 32 But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined[c] so that we may not be condemned along with the world. 33 So then, my brothers,[d] when you come together to eat, wait for[e] 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.

Footnotes:

[a] 1 Corinthians 11:30 Greek *have fallen asleep* (as in 15:6, 20)

[b] 1 Corinthians 11:31 Or discerned

[c] 1 Corinthians 11:32 Or when we are judged we are being disciplined by the Lord

[d] Corinthians 11:33 Or brothers and sisters

[e] 1 Corinthians 11:33 Or *share with*

I believe long separation from the Church and the Table can bring death spiritually.

Illus.– finger off at Sherwood Products or **embers in a fire if pulled away...**

Conclusion: William Barclay says in his book *The Mind of Jesus*:

“The Church, at least in modern times, has made out of the Last Supper not a meal but a symbol of a meal. Can it be that at least in part we have been mistaken as to the intention of Jesus? It remains a very definite possibility that Jesus did not intend to institute a symbolic meal, but that he meant that every time bread was broken and eaten, and every time wine was poured out and drunk – that is, at every meal in every house – he was to be remembered.”

- We cannot be Christians only one day a week
- Nor should we only remember Christ’s sacrifice for 10 minutes on Sundays
- Jesus must be in our every thought, every day!