

How to Celebrate the Lord's Supper
1 Corinthians 11:17-34; October 16, 2022

Introduction:

I don't know about you...but one of the things I really enjoy and treasure is receiving hand-written (not text or email), where someone takes pen and paper and writes a personalized note. To be even more particular, I love when those notes say really nice things about me (anyone else?). And when these notes come from people that I know well and that I respect and who really love me, it means even more.

When I turned 40 a year and half ago, Leigh worked secretly behind the scenes to put together a really cool gift for me. This is it. It's a collection of pictures and personal, mostly hand-written notes from people who know me. It includes notes from some of you, my family, friends I grew up with in NC, friends and mentors from college, people whom I impacted from previous churches I served at. It's wicked cool!!!

Read briefly from Jake's note.

Read briefly from Laura's note.

These notes fill my heart with joy. All of the notes in here were super encouraging. But as I reflect on the people that wrote these notes, some of them also at times in my life also challenged, exhorted, and rebuked me in areas where I was not honoring God with my life. It's the people that care about us most whom also have a place to speak the truth in love into our lives and grab our attention.

Paul had such a relationship with the Corinthians. Our passage last week started with these words: "Now I commend you..." Those are the words that we want to hear. Keep them flowing Paul.

But this week, as we begin to read in 11:17 Paul writes, "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."

- Just as the Corinthians needed to hear these words of correction related to when they *gather and come together*, I believe these words are just as relevant to RHC. May we hear them as if coming from a shepherd who cares deeply for his flock.

Context (17-22):

Now 11:17-22 sets the context for us to understand Paul's teaching that he is going to deliver.

Read 1 Cor. 11:17-22.

1. Paul's concern is related to when they *come together* as a church.

- “When you come together” (17).
- “When you come together as church” (18).
- “When you come together” (20).

2. Paul has heard that there are *divisions* when they come together.

- This is the same word that he uses in 1:10, but there those divisions were based on loyalties to specific leaders/teachers.
- Paul seems to be exercising “judicious pastoral caution” (so Thiselton) and avoiding a rash generalization and accusation of everyone. In other words, this might not have been the case for everyone and some were probably more guilty than others.
- Paul even alludes to God's sovereign purpose in allowing divisions so that those who are authentic and genuine followers stand out (so Piper).
- The division here is a social and economic division (read v. 21 again):
 - The hungry poor and the drunken rich.
 - The “haves” and the “have nots.”

3. How was this possible in the church?

- The church probably met in homes of those who were well off. (cf. Acts 18:6-7). The way these homes were set up:
 - Dining room (called the triclinium) that could hold around 10 guests.
 - Atrium: a larger room that could hold as many as 40.
- The cultural customs were as follows:
 - Food and Wine:
 - The best food and wine was served in the Dining Room.
 - The food and wine in the atrium was inferior, and often the leftovers from the Dining Room.
 - Guests:
 - The host would invite privileged guests to join him in the Dining Room. As a result, they got to eat lavishly and drink the finest wines. As you can imagine, eating in this room signified a mark of favor and status by the host.
 - When the Dining Room filled up, the poor and less esteemed guests eat in the atrium (aka. “Overflow room”). In the eyes of the host, they were lucky to be included at all (so Thiselton).
 - Additionally, it's possible that the poor would've had to finish their work before they could come, making it difficult for them to be on time.
 - The guests in the atrium ate and drank lesser foods or maybe even none at all.
- This cultural practice had infiltrated the church! Can you see the divisions that this would've caused?
 - The rich didn't wait for the poor. “They ate and drank in their cliques” (Morris).
 - The rich eat almost oblivious to the fact that the the poor, right in there very

midst, having nothing to eat.

- Some were eating and drinking as if they were the center of the universe and with disregard to the poor and needy around them.
- The socially advantaged and the socially disadvantaged.
- The church of God is despised and the poor are being humiliated.

4. What makes this even worse? They were combining it with and calling it the Lord's Supper!

- This leads Paul to respond with a series of rhetorical questions.
 - Is this the Lord's Supper you are eating or a meal for the host and his favored guests?
 - Who is the focus of attention? The Lord or the host?
 - Who is hosting this meal? The Lord or the host?
- The problem: their practice undermined the very purpose of the Lord's Supper:
 - This division by social class (just like division by racism or cultural bias) was contrary to the message of Jesus and the gospel.
 - His death demonstrated love for the weak, the poor, the despised, the outsider. It was "for us."
 - I guarantee you that there was no celebrating by those who had nothing to eat. The only celebrating was by those who had something.
- They might have called it the Lord's Supper, but in practice it was NOT the Lord's Supper. It was just a meal in a private house to benefit an inner group of people.
 - If that's what you want to do, do it in your own home...but don't mix that with the gathering of the church of God.

Transition:

- Why won't Paul commend them? Because their behavior contradicts the meaning of the Lord's Supper.
- This is the context by which Paul then gives one of the clearest teachings on the meaning, purpose and practice of the Lord's Supper. That is what we'll spend the rest of our time on today.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-34.

The Point: We celebrate the Lord's Supper rightly when Jesus is the center of that supper!

I want to draw out five truths from this text for how we should celebrate the Lord's Supper in a way where Jesus is the center. The first one is this:

I. We Proclaim Jesus' sacrificial death (23-26).

Paul grounds his teaching about the *Lord's Supper* as having actually come from the *Lord*.

- While some think that what Paul really means is that the disciples told him about the Last

Supper (so Kenner), I believe that Paul means what he says...that *the Lord* directly revealed this to him (cf. Acts 18:9f; 22:18; 23:11; 27:23–25; 2 Cor. 12:7; Gal. 1:12; 2:2).

- There's no doubt that Paul had probably heard from others about what happened at the Last Supper, but ultimately, Jesus confirmed the truths of this supper directly to Paul.
- So Paul is not writing to revise this tradition, but rather stands under the authority of this tradition.
- This makes Jesus the focus and the content of the Lord's Supper. It is rooted in what he said and what he did!

The background of the Last Supper is the Jewish Passover Meal (23-24a).

- When Jesus gathered with his disciples the evening before his death, they were gathering to celebrate the Passover Meal (cf. Matt. 26:17-30; Mark 14:12-16; Luke 22:7-13; John 19:14).
- A brief background of the Passover:
 - Israel was enslaved in Egypt.
 - God raises up Moses and sends him to Pharaoh to ask him to let God's people go.
 - Pharaoh refuses so God sends 10 plagues.
 - The 10th plague was the killing of the firstborn son and the Passover.
 - The night of the Passover, the Israelites were to sacrifice a spotless lamb and mark their doorposts with its blood (Exod. 12:21-22). When God came that evening, he would "pass over" the households that showed the blood.
 - In a very real way, the blood saved them from death. It commemorates Israel's freedom from slavery and God's redemption of his people.
 - Additionally, God commanded a meal to remember God's deliverance and to observe this meal forever (Exod. 12:24). At this meal they would eat lamb, bitter herbs, and unleavened bread (Exod. 12:8).
- The Exodus, God's redeeming of his people from slavery, was to shape their minds and life!
- Here's the cool part: the Passover was meant to foreshadow a greater sacrificial lamb who bring true freedom and life: Jesus!

"Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed." (1 Corinthians 5:7, ESV)

In the same way that Israel was to reshape their entire lives around the realities of the Exodus, Jesus' death is meant to do that for us!

Transition: let's keep reading. There are two very important phrases I want to unpack.

"This is my body, which is for you (24)."

- There was divine purpose in the awful suffering and death of Jesus. It was "for you."
- Why is Jesus' body "for me"?

- In the same way that Israel needed redemption and salvation...so do you and I.
- If you and I are “ok,” tell me why did Jesus have to die?
- Jesus died because a lamb had to be sacrificed for God to not just “passover” us, but to redeem, renew, restore and save us!
- All of us stand on the brink of death (Rom. 6:23) and needing a spotless lamb!

“This cup is the new covenant in my blood (25).”

- Covenant language is all over the Old Testament.
 - Abrahamic Covenant
 - Mosaic Covenant
 - Davidic Covenant
 - Think of a covenant as promises between two parties that often involved protection and provision with a call to loyalty.
 - Here’s the problem in the OT: Israel consistently broke the covenants that they made with God. This led the prophets of the OT to speak and long for a *new covenant*.
- New Covenant

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.” (Jeremiah 31:31–34, ESV)

- How does Jesus relate to this new covenant?
 - Jesus is saying that the shedding of his blood established this new covenant.
- What’s so great about this new covenant?
 - I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts.
 - I will be their God and they shall be my people.
 - They will know me.
 - I will forgive their sin and remember it no more.
 - In summary,
 - Through Jesus, your sins (ALL OF THEM) can be forgiven and God will pour his Holy Spirit (the very presence of Christ) in you so that you might know him intimately!!!
- This new covenant is founded on the death of Christ! His death purchased...
 - New life
 - Total forgiveness

- Inner transformation (a new heart).
- Personal and intimate knowledge of God.
- We are his people. God is for US!

What about transubstantiation?

- This is a doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church (see Section 1376 in the Catechism of the CC).
- In short, it teaches that once an ordained priest blesses the bread and the wine, it is transformed into the actual flesh and blood of Christ (even though it retains the appearance, odor and taste of bread and wine).
- The result is that Jesus is “re-sacrificed” every time the we celebrate the Lord’s Supper.
- I believe this is not in accordance with Scripture for a number of reasons:
 - The most natural understanding is that the bread *represents* Jesus’ body.
 - Illustration: If I were to hold up a picture of my family and “This is my family,” how would you understand that? No one would think that the picture has physically turned into my family.
 - Jesus in John 6:63 says that he is speaking figuratively (see also John 6:35).

“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, ESV)

- Jesus has died once for all and does not need to be sacrificed again (cf. Heb. 7:27; 10:10).
- Eating and drinking are spiritual acts of the soul.

“You proclaim the Lord’s death” (26).

- We we celebrate the Lord’s Supper, we are preaching! It’s a sermon!
- What are we preaching? Jesus’ death saves sinners!
- And this should not surprise us. I preached a sermon on 1 Cor. 1 where Paul says,

“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18).

Transition: so we proclaim Jesus’ death. Second,...

II. We Remember and Feast on Jesus by Faith (24-25).

I want to go back and revisit a few phrases that I skipped over:

- “Do this in remembrance of me” (24).
- “Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me” (25).

What is Jesus hoping the act of remembering does for us?

- A remembering that results in worship, trust and obedience.

- A remembering that transforms both our attitude and our actions.
- A remembering that reshapes our identity.

“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20, ESV)

- My identity becomes one that is shaped by caring for “the other.”
 - Remember his death saves me from my self-centered and selfish life. I care a lot about me!
 - But when I remember and meditate on his death, I remember that it was “for others.”
 - There were those in the church at Corinth that had a self-centered concern for status, honor and approval by others such that the weak, despised and poor were ignored.
 - What we all need more of...is a vivid remembrance of Jesus’ “other-centered” death such that it reshapes our lives.
- The Lord’s Supper is an invitation to *feast* on Jesus and have our souls strengthened by the good news of the gospel.
- It’s a remembering that feeds our souls on all that Jesus is for us!
- It’s a remembering that brings nourishment when we are weak.

“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.” (John 6:35, ESV)

What remembering is not:

“Therefore, the mental action of the Lord’s Supper is foundationally remembering. Not imagining. Not dreaming. Not channeling. Not listening. Not going into neutral. It is a conscious directing of the mind back into history to Jesus and what we know about him from the Bible. The Lord’s Supper roots us, time after time, in the nitty-gritty of history. Bread and Cup. Body and blood. Execution and death” (Piper).

Remember...

- He was betrayed by one of his very own.
- His obedience to God while under trial (not will but yours be done).
- The injustice that took place leading up to his death.
- Him being mocked and spat upon.
- Him being beaten to the point of death.
- Him wearing a crown of thorns that punctured his scalp.
- Him carrying his own cross.
- The nails driven through his hands and feet.
- Him saying, “Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.”
- Him saying to the thief beside him, “Today you will be with me in paradise.”

- His words, “It is finished. In to your hands I commit my spirit.”
- That in his death, he drank every last drop of the cup of God’s wrath. He exhausted the wrath of God towards us.
- And be grateful! Enjoy! Delight! Be satisfied in him!

Transition, in addition to remembering and feasting with faith, third...

III. We Examine our Following of Jesus (27-32).

Jesus warns that we’re to approach the Lord’s Supper with a certain level of seriousness (not careless or callous). There’s a way to celebrate the Lord’s Supper in an *unworthy manner*.

- The Lord’s Supper is not meant to be some religious ritual where you go through the motions.

A few observations and thoughts:

- In a very real sense, none of us are *worthy* of the Lord’s Supper.
- How might we approach the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy way?
 - We don’t proclaim the Lord’s death.
 - We fail to recognize what the bread and the cup symbolize.
 - We don’t remember and feast in such a way that the cross reshapes our attitudes and actions.
 - Our sin is what sent Jesus to the cross. We can’t celebrate the Lord’s Supper which proclaims that very cross and not feel remorse and sorrow over personal sin our lives.
- We approach it in a worthy way when we do self-examination.
 - Do you see what the bread and the cup signify?
 - Do you feel remorse for your sins (actions and attitudes)?
 - Do you have a desire to repent and turn from your sins?
 - Do you trust in Jesus for complete forgiveness for your sins?

Why should we not approach the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner?

- Believers who don’t approach the Lord’s Supper the in a worthy manner face God’s fatherly discipline (not because of wrath). This discipline is an act of grace so that we might not be condemned. They are meant to bring us back in line with his way for our lives.
 - Note: not all illness is the result of God’s discipline.
- In the case at Corinth, they had turned the meal into a social divide that did not proclaim the Lord’s death and God had disciplined some of them.
- In short, they were blind to their own sin.
 - How do we overcome spiritual blindness?
 - Ask God to reveal sin?
 - Live in community and ask others to help you identify your sin. I bet the poor at Corinth would’ve loved the opportunity to share how they had

been humiliated.

Sidebar Questions:

- **Who should participate in the Lord's Supper?**
 - The Lord's Supper is for those who are willing to examine themselves, which includes believing in what the bread and the cup symbolize. It's a family meal, for believers only.

- **Should unbelievers participate in the Lord's Supper?**
 - If you are here today and are still exploring Jesus, thank you for being here! We're glad you are here.
 - When we celebrate here in a few moments, based on what Paul has just said, we believe that you should not partake.
 - That's not because we don't want you to partake. We do!!! This celebration is proclaiming Jesus' death for you! We want you to feast on Jesus. So as we partake of the bread and the cup, we'd invite you to reflect and believe and trust in Jesus! Feast on him and then come let us know so we can get you read to partake the next time we celebrate.

- **Should children participate in the Lord's Supper?**
 - General Answer:
 - Communion is open to everyone, including children, who believe in Jesus for their forgiveness of sins and who intend to follow him in obedience to his commands.
 - Children can participate if they understand the gospel, have given a credible profession of faith in Jesus and intend to follow Jesus.
 - Parents, we leave it up to you to decide when your children are ready.
 - Personal Answer:
 - This is how we deal with this in the Chasteen household.
 - I tell my children that they can partake after they have been baptized. That allows them to go through our baptism process, which includes making sure they understand the gospel and then following through with a public profession of faith.

- **Can I celebrate the Lord's Supper on my own?**
 - Given the focus on "when you come together," we typically only practice communion as a gathered body on Sunday mornings.
 - We would not be opposed to doing the Lord's Supper in exceptional cases where someone was physically unable to attend a Sunday mornings.

- **How frequent should we celebrate Lord's Supper?**
 - The meal, as described by Paul, isn't a five-course meal. It's eating the bread and

drinking the cup.

- We aren't given details about the kind of bread or how it was broken.
- In terms of the cup, Jesus talks about the "fruit of the vine." We use grape juice for this.
- Now back to frequency, Paul says, "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup" (26).
 - There is no direct command regarding the frequency.
 - Some churches practice it weekly while others quarterly.
 - At RHC, we typically celebrate at least once/month.
- We want to celebrate in a way that values its importance.

IV. We Renew our Commitment to Love as Jesus Loved (33-34).

Remember the initial issue: the Corinthians were not loving each other well. Paul introduces this teaching not as a theology of the Lord's Supper but to correct their selfish behavior among themselves.

When you partake of the Lord's Supper, look around. It's a family meal. So as you celebrate, let it remind you of the people God has placed in your life and may it move you to renewed commitment to love others around you.

Before Covid, we used to use an entire loaf of bread. I love the picture. We are a part of the "body" of Christ, and we together are feasting on Jesus. Jesus didn't just die for you individually. He died for the church!

May it remind you to die to yourself and give yourself for others!

V. We Long for Jesus' Return (26).

I close by taking us back to verse 26. "You proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

While the focus of the Lord's Supper is on Jesus' death, his resurrection is very much present. While we experience the kingdom of God *now*, there is also a "not-yet" component to it.

Jesus said he wouldn't drink from the fruit of the vine he drinks it a new kingdom of God.

The Lord's Supper is a time to look back, look around and look forward.

Conclusion