

# CCLEB SERMON NOTES

SUNDAY SEPTEMBER 8, 2024  
1 CORINTHIANS 11:17-34

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## WHEN WE GATHER FOR COMMUNION

Did you know that if you turn a canoe over, you can wear it as a hat? You can—it's because it's capsized.



The Corinthian church had "capsized" the Lord's instructions concerning observing communion. Today, we will answer this question which may have caused you to struggle at times: Should I take communion if, at a particular time in my life, I feel unworthy of taking it? So, let's dig in.



In our study of 1st Corinthians thus far, we've seen that:

- In **chapters 1 to 4**, Paul deals with divisions in the church.
- In **chapters 5 to 7**, Paul deals with problems caused by sexual practices.
- In **chapters 8 to 10**, Paul deals with problems caused by food practices.
- In **chapters 11 to 14**—chapter 11 being this morning—the beginning of this, Paul deals with problems in their gatherings.



Today's lesson specifically deals with the problems the Corinthian church faced as they gathered to observe communion.



So, as we read these first three verses, keep in mind that the context is Paul dealing with them observing communion. Here are the first three **verses, 17 to 19**:

"But in the following instructions, I cannot praise you, for it sounds as if more harm than good is done when you meet together. First, I hear that there are divisions among you when you meet as a church, and to some extent, I believe it. But, of course, there must be divisions among you so that those who have God's approval will be recognized."

The NIV says, "Your meetings do more harm than good." Think about that. Paul is saying, in the context of communion, that it would be better for them not to observe communion than to continue to observe it as they were. Those are strong words.

In The Following  
Directives I Have No  
Praise For You, For Your  
Meetings Do More Harm  
Than Good.  
1 Corinthians 11-17  
BibleWordings.com

One root cause of these unholy meetings, Paul says, is that there are divisions among the members. The Greek word is "schisma," which means to rend as a cloth or tunic, to tear apart, division/dissension.

## Greek – Divisions

### Schisma

-To rent, tear, as a cloth  
or tunic

-To tear apart

-Division, dissention

This is where we get our English word "schism." In the entire New Testament, this word is only used twice, both times in First Corinthians. It gives you an idea of what was going on in the Corinthian church. The commentator Benson says it indicates, "the indulging of any schism, the indulging of any attitude contrary to the tender care of each other."



What is the cause of the schism? **Verse 19** says, "No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval." Most commentaries note that this schism was not over some fundamental disagreement concerning some theological issue, but rather leaders power-brokering for power, prestige, and popularity.



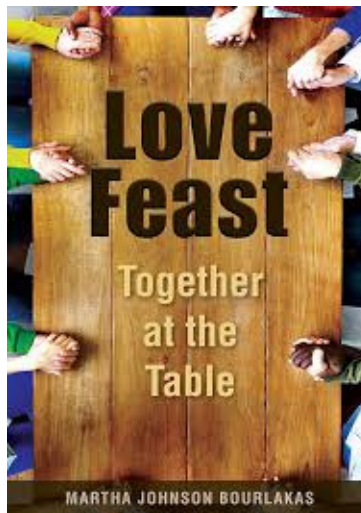
Due to this, Paul says that each faction feels a need to prove that they are right, and that the others are wrong. Again, there's really nothing new under the sun, is there? Especially in the political environment today.

# I AM RIGHT YOU ARE WRONG

Paul then delves into the context of the schism in verse 20: "When you meet together, you are not really interested in the Lord's Supper." Consider that now. The Lord's Supper points back to the Last Supper of the Lord during Passion Week, including the meal that He and His disciples ate together, and the communion which followed. The Lord's Supper, or as Jude, Jesus's brother in the Book of Jude, calls it, the "charity feast." Paul says, "You are adulterating this charity feast."



Ellicott says, "To these charity feasts, each church member was to bring a contribution of food—the rich out of their abundance and the poor of whatever they could afford. And this food, thus provided, was shared by all." However, through selfishness and self-interest...



**Verse 20** says: "When you meet together, you're not really interested in the Lord's Supper. For some of you hurry to eat your own meal without sharing with others. As a result, some go hungry while others get drunk. What? Don't you have your own homes for eating and drinking? Or do you really want to disgrace God's church and shame the poor? What am I supposed to say? Do you want me to praise you? Well, I certainly will not praise you for this."

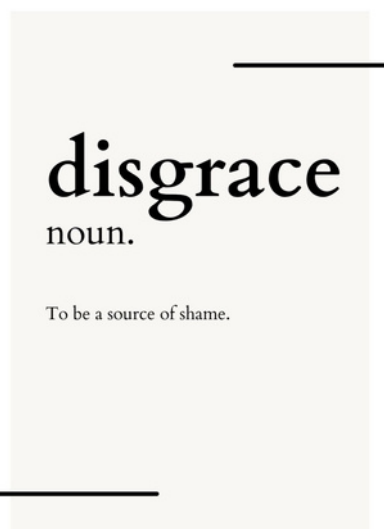
Paul's criticism in **verse 21** is that "you hurry to eat your food you brought so you don't need to share it with any of the poor people around you. As a result, those of you who are better off go away with full stomachs while the poor go away hungry." Paul asks in **verse 22**, "What? Is this really true?"





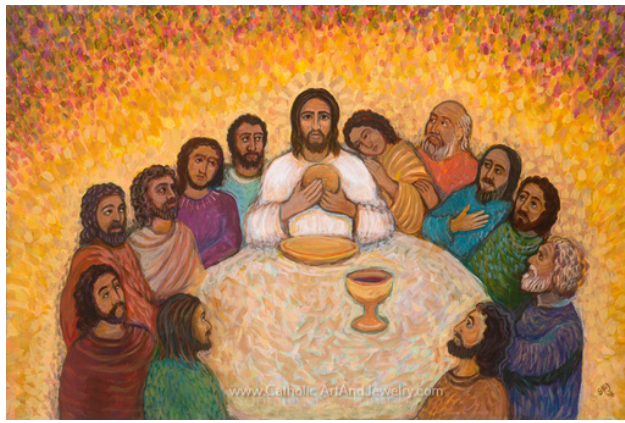
We have a picnic coming up. Imagine people who are better off bringing steak and lobster, and they put their blanket down. They get their husband, wife, and children, huddle around it, and shield all the food and drink from the poor in the room because they don't want them to see it or get any of it. The poor don't have enough to eat, and not only do they not care about it, but they also withhold what they could share. Think about what that would look like at a church picnic. That's what was going on in the Corinthian church.

Paul says, "Do you really want to disgrace the church in this way and shame the poor?" Just consider the word "disgrace." He says you dishonor God by not displaying grace as you meet for this common meal. By refusing to share with the poor, it's a disgrace—you are not displaying grace. Imagine Paul asking his next question to each of the factions who, in verse 19, say they want to be right and recognized. Paul says in **verse 22**, "Do you want me to praise you? Well, I do not."



Over the next 12 verses, Paul instructs the Corinthians—and us—on how they, and we, should observe the Lord's Supper so that God can praise them and us. Listen to what he says in **verse 23**: "For I pass on to you what I received from the Lord himself. On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took some bread and gave thanks to God for it." This is in the Upper Room. Then he broke it in pieces and said, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, he took the cup of wine after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood. Do this to remember me as often as you drink it. For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord's death until he comes again."

Here, Paul is recounting the first and original Lord's Supper, which Jesus and his 12 disciples attended. If you would allow me, I'd like to go off on a tangent for a moment. At that first and original love feast, do you think the disciples had even a clue as to what Jesus was talking about—about him being beaten and suffering, about his blood and body, about the cup and the bread? I sincerely doubt it. Remember, they didn't have the Holy Spirit yet, so they weren't really being spoken to by the Holy Spirit; they were all in the flesh.



Jesus began that Last Supper by saying this to his 12 disciples. This is how the supper began in **verse 14**: "When the time came, Jesus and the apostles sat down together at the table." That's the beginning of the Upper Room supper. And how does the supper end? With the disciples arguing about which one of them was the greatest. Ten verses later, in **verse 24**, it says, "Then they began to argue among themselves about who would be the greatest among them." So, that was the conclusion of the Lord's Supper. On top of that, to add to it, Peter is told by Jesus that he is about to deny Jesus three times. Ten verses after that, Jesus says, "You will deny three times that you even know me."



Now, with that being the memory of the 11 remaining disciples after the Last Supper with Jesus, try to imagine how they felt the very next time they celebrated communion together and observed the Lord's Supper. Reading these commands of Jesus for the very first time, with that first supper in their rearview mirror—now that they've received the Holy Spirit, now that they have seen Jesus brutalized, His body beaten, His blood poured out—picture them, for the very first time, taking communion after that event as they repeat Jesus's words: "This is my body, given for you; this is my blood, poured out for you."

In the context of them having witnessed all that they witnessed—Jesus's horrific flogging and crucifixion—all of those mental pictures now flooding their minds as they share in their first communion together, I suspect that it took them by storm. I suspect they were ambushed. I don't think they realized how different that next communion was going to be because of all that they had seen and how those words now took on so much meaning.

So, with the disciples' broken hearts and these horrible pictures in their minds of Jesus being flogged and crucified, as they now partake of the Lord's Supper, contrast that with the Corinthians being so "in the flesh" that their focus of communion is eating as much as they can and refusing to share their food with the poor among them. What a contrast!

Then in **verse 22**, Paul begins passing on to them—and to us—the instructions the Lord gave to Paul to give to them and to us. **Verse 23**: "For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 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.' In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.'"

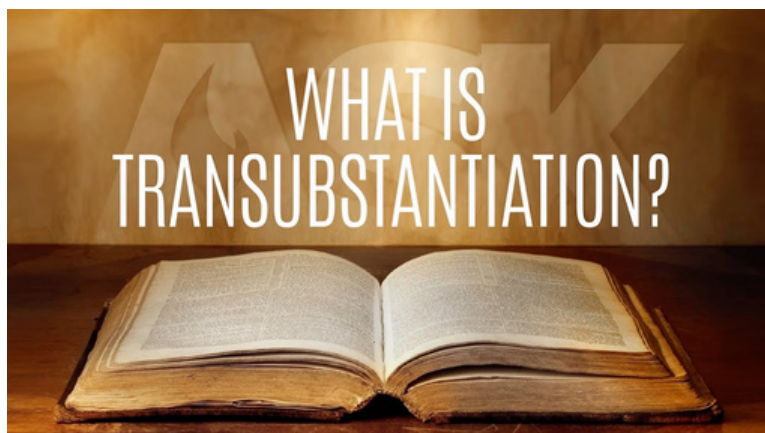
Paul received this instruction from the Lord Jesus by direct revelation from the Lord himself, either by vision or by dream, because it is clearly inferred that Paul never actually met Jesus face to face during Jesus's lifetime. Many times, as we celebrate communion, the leader will quote these very verses that we're reading today in **1st Corinthians 11**. They were given by Jesus but were given to Paul by Jesus by revelation, and they are for our benefit as well.



And what are Jesus's words to us? "Do this in remembrance of me. Do this in remembrance of me. Do this in remembrance of me." We do this today in remembrance of Him. And why does Jesus want us to observe communion? **Verse 26** says, "For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord's death until he comes again."



Note that **verse 26** says "every time you eat this bread," every time you eat this bread. In the context of eating the bread, Barnes says this: "This is a direct and positive refutation of the doctrine of transubstantiation"—that's a mouthful—that's found in the Roman Catholic Church, claiming that the bread is changed into the actual body of the Lord Jesus. Barnes says, because here in the unfailing Word of God, it is expressly called bread, still remaining bread even after the bread has been consecrated.





A friend of mine in ministry had a friend who was allergic to bread, and he thought, "If this turns into the body of Christ, if I take this, I won't react to the bread." He took it, and he reacted. So, I'm not sure what you would do with that. I always thought it was an interesting observation—a test of sorts, I guess. If he did react to his allergies when he took the bread, which should have been the body of Christ... And Jesus tells us that we are to celebrate until He returns—until Jesus returns—at which point there will no longer be any need for symbols for His broken, pierced body. We will stand in the very presence of that. We will see His pierced hands; we will see His pierced feet; symbols no longer necessary.



And then Paul closes this chapter with some stern warnings.

**Verse 27-34:** "So anyone who eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord unworthily is guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. That is why you should examine yourself before eating the bread and drinking the cup. For if you eat the bread or drink the cup without honoring the body of Christ, you are eating and drinking God's judgment upon yourself. That is why many of you are weak and sick, and some have even died. But if we would examine ourselves, we would not be judged by God in this way. Yet when we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned along with the world. So, my dear brothers and sisters, when you gather for the Lord's Supper, wait for each other. If you are really hungry, eat at home so you won't bring judgment upon yourselves when you meet together. I'll give you instructions about the other matters after I arrive."

Gulp—some strong words in that. Let's take this apart a bit. **Verse 27** by itself: "So anyone who eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord unworthily is guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord."



Barnes, a commentator, says, "There is perhaps no verse in the Bible that has caused more trouble to weak and feeble Christians than this passage," deterring so many from taking communion. Now, the incorrect interpretation goes something like this: "I am a sinner, and because I'm such a sinner, I am unworthy to partake in this holy ordinance."



As a pastor, I've heard that many times—someone says, "I don't think I can take communion because I'm unworthy." Well, the truth is, by sinning—by our sin—we are all unworthy, and I would be very slow to not participate because of sin. People can disqualify themselves.

Matthew Henry counters this by saying, "The Holy Spirit never caused this scripture to be written to deter serious Christians from their duty to celebrate communion, though the devil has often made use of it for that cause." One group that should not participate or partake in communion, for sure, is unbelievers.



Gill says, "The Lord's Supper may be taken unworthily when it is partaken of by an unworthy person." He says the Syriac version states, "One for whom it is not fit." Of course, the idea—Gill still speaking—is that the Lord's Supper is not fit for an unsaved person, for whom the body and blood of Christ have no meaning.



Beyond this, there are infidels who celebrate mock communions. So evil and vile is their hatred for Christ and His ordinance that they observe mock celebrations of the Lord's Supper. It happens. I remember an article I read—J. Edwin Orr wrote an article on prayer and revival. In a summary, it says not many people realize it, but in the wake of the American Revolution (1776-1781), there was a moral slump in the United States. For the first time in the history of American settlement, women were afraid to go out at night for fear of assault. The Chief Justice of the United States, John Marshall, wrote to the bishop of Virginia, James Madison, and said, "The church is too far gone to ever be redeemed." Philosophers Voltaire and Tom Paine publicly proclaimed, "Christianity will be forgotten in 30 years."

A dark time, indeed. Consider the liberal arts colleges at the time: a poll taken at Harvard discovered not one believer in the whole student body. At Princeton, the students took a Bible out of a local Presbyterian Church in New Jersey and burned it in a public bonfire in the late 1700s. They put on anti-Christian plays. The darkness was evident. Listen—they held a mock communion at Williams College. It happens. It happens today; there are still groups that meet and hold mock communions, so vile is their hatred for Christ.

## J. Edwin Orr – Prayer and Revival

Not many people realize that in the wake of the American Revolution (following 1776-1781) there was a moral slump.

Drunkenness became epidemic.

Profanity was of the most shocking kind. For the first time in the history of the American settlement, women were afraid to go out at night for fear of assault.

The chief justice of the United States, John Marshall, wrote to the bishop of Virginia, James Madison, and said, "The church is too far gone to ever be redeemed."

The philosophers Voltaire and Tom Payne publicly proclaimed, "Christianity will be forgotten in 30 years"

Consider the liberal arts colleges at that time. A poll taken at Harvard had discovered not one believer in the whole student body.

Students rioted.

At Princeton, the students took a Bible out of a local Presbyterian church in New Jersey, and they burnt it in a public bonfire.

They put on anti-Christian plays at Dartmouth.

They held a mock communion at Williams College.

**Verse 28** says this: "That is why you should examine yourself before eating the bread and drinking the cup." Examine yourself.



In the Church of the Brethren, where I grew up, we celebrated communion just twice a year, in spring and fall. It was always on a Saturday evening, and as a part of that experience, there was an examination service in the afternoon. I think it started at 1:00 or 2:00. The purpose of the examination service was that the pastor would give a message, saying, "If you're coming to communion tonight, we ask you to first examine your life this afternoon. If there's some wrong that you have or an issue with another brother or sister, go to them this afternoon, reconcile, and then come to communion tonight."

I remember the story of two men in our church who had a long-standing difference. On a Saturday afternoon, they reconciled, and when they came together that Saturday night for the common meal and foot washing, they sat next to one another and washed each other's feet. There's something to this, folks, about understanding what Christ did for us—the forgiveness He's offered to us, the right relationship we have with Him—and us understanding, in response to that, we should then work at having right relationships with our brothers and sisters around us.

Jesus said this very thing in **Matthew 18:15**: "If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the offense. If the person listens and confesses, you have won that person back." So if someone sins against you, you go privately and point out the offense. But what about if you sin against someone else? Then what do you do? Well, Jesus covered that too in **Matthew 5**: "So if you are presenting a sacrifice at the altar in the temple and suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there." So, if you have something against someone, you are to go. If you know someone has something against you, you should go. In either instance, you are to initiate.

Then in **verse 29**, we read this: "For if you eat the bread or drink the cup without honoring the body of Christ, you are eating and drinking God's judgment upon yourself." Now, to me personally—just myself—I take this to mean that every time I take communion, I should be very diligent not to let my mind wander but to focus on what Jesus did for me on the cross.



I've never shared this before, and I never did because I didn't want you to take this as some formula or better way. But probably 40 years ago, someone shared this with me, and it has had so much significance for me for 40 years. I want to share this with you; you do with this as you want, as the Lord prompts you. But this is what I was told, and this is what I do to keep my mind from wandering: When I take the bread and it's time to eat it, I put it between my back teeth and just lodge it there—just hold it there. Then I picture the Roman soldier coming with a spike and putting it up against Jesus's wrist, because the spike went through the wrist, not the hands; the hands can't support the weight—they've proven that it was through the wrist. I picture that big metal spike being put up against it, and I picture that enormous metal hammer coming down. As I picture that hammer striking the nail and making that noise, I take the first bite of the bread. Then I picture the nail going into the second wrist and that hammer coming up and coming down, and as the clang of that hammer meets the spike, I take the second bite. Then I picture the spike being put in the feet of Jesus, and from excavations they've done, they've discovered that in all probability, almost all the time when people were crucified, they had their ankles turned sideways like this, with one spike put through both ankles—not two spikes, just one. I picture again the spike being put there, and that hammer coming down. As I hear the noise—the clang of the hammer hitting the nail—I take the third bite. Then I picture the soldier coming to check if Jesus was dead and the spear going into His side, and when I do, I take the fourth bite.

For the cup, I do something similar. Again, all this was shared with me; I don't take credit for this. But I picture myself at the side of the cross. Where were all the disciples? Now, we know John was there with Mary and some other women, but we are not told that any of the other disciples were there. They may have been, although you'd think they would have been. I picture the other disciples hiding in the shadows, afraid of being identified with Jesus—in the alleys, looking out at a distance so they don't get caught, so no one observes them. I picture myself right in there among them. Do I really think I'd be braver than they were? And at some moment in time, as I'm observing in fear from the shadows, it hits me: He did this for me. He did this for me. He's dying for me right now. And I go running out of the shadows. I run up to the cross—that big, rough, sturdy, splintery, rugged cross. I throw my arms around it, and I feel the warm blood coursing down that cross and now running over my arms. And I drink the cup.

That's how I focus when I take communion. Again, for 20-plus years, I've hesitated to share this because I don't want you to make this some formula or something you need to do, or think that it is better than another way. You may have a better way—something that means more to you—but I feel I'd be remiss if I didn't share this because it has meant so much to me through these years.

And then Paul sternly warns that if one partakes in an unworthy manner, that person is actually eating and drinking God's judgment upon themselves. Verse 29 says, "For if you eat the bread or drink the cup without honoring the body of Christ, you are eating and drinking God's judgment upon yourself." That is why many experience consequences, either naturally or by God's direct visitation.



The Expositor's Greek Testament says this: "In Paul making this statement, he must have been conscious of some specific revelation, some situation where this occurred, where people actually died."



Now, what I'm going to share next is not Scripture, but I wonder if this severest of penalties is not similar in nature to the death of Ananias and Sapphira, who lied about selling some property, and then the Lord killed them. They lied. Now, do you think others have lied about things like this since then, in the centuries since? Of course. Did they die? Probably not many, if any. So why Ananias and Sapphira? I surmise it may be because they were the first to do so and got caught, and God made an example of them. I believe they were true believers. I believe personally they went to heaven, but they were made an example of nonetheless.

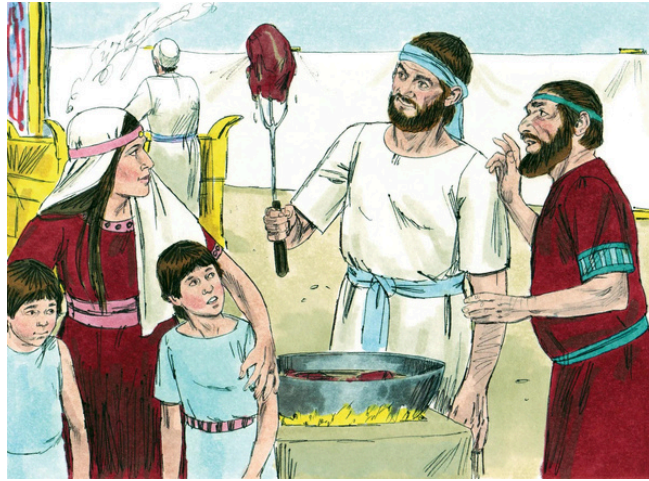


We find the same thing multiple times in the Bible. In **Leviticus 10**, Aaron's sons offered unholy fire and they were killed on the spot.





and yet centuries later, in **1 Samuel**, Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, did worse things repeatedly—taking advantage of women, taking meat before it was cooked—and they were killed eventually, but not on the spot.



Or in **Numbers 15**, when the first man was brought to Moses, charged with gathering wood on the Sabbath, he was stoned to death. Since then, were others killed who worked on the Sabbath? What's the difference? The first time.



It's kind of like a boss saying, "Starting tomorrow, anyone who comes to work more than 15 minutes late will be fired on the spot. No excuses." Harsh, yes. So what if the very next day someone comes to work an hour late? He becomes an example. What if he had done it a year later? Maybe mercy would have been shown, but not day one.



So I wonder if there had been an account or accounts that Paul knew of that aren't recorded in the Bible for us, where in the early church, there were some instances where God actually took the lives of those who made a mockery of the blood and the cup. It's possible. This could explain, in part, why those students at William and Mary College were not struck dead on the spot by God as well.



Then Paul deals with the Lord's Supper meal, or as Jude calls it, the charity feast. **Verse 33:** "So, my dear brothers and sisters, when you gather for the Lord's Supper, wait for each other. If you are really hungry, eat at home so you won't bring judgment upon yourself when you meet together. I'll give you instructions about the other matters after I arrive." Just a little suggestion: if you are ever invited to a church that celebrates both communion together with a full meal, I would encourage you—small point, but to follow Paul's guidelines here—to eat at home before you attend the meal so that you don't even let the thought cross your mind, "I hope I get enough to eat tonight."



So, how does today's lesson apply to me?

**Number one:** I suspect that divisions are at the root of nearly all church problems. Charles Finney, who was a revivalist, said that when revivals would break out in a church or community, the very first strategy the devil would use to stop the revival in its tracks was to bring in disunity. Why is that so effective for Satan? Because Finney said that when disunity enters the church, the Holy Spirit ceases to strive—He stops working. That is a high price to pay, folks—not to have the Holy Spirit at work in the church. Never forget that a fellowship pays a huge price for disunity: a loss of the Holy Spirit's presence and influence. And the Bible says, "Apart from Him, we can do nothing."

**Second point:** Note what Paul says is at the core root of these divisions, **verse 19:** "But of course, there must be divisions among you so that you who have..." And there is a clear test for this to see if you have an issue with this, if I have an issue with this. Is it easy for you to say that you are wrong, or is that really difficult? Listen, if it's not easy for you to say that you're wrong, divisions will result—in your marriage, with your children, your coworkers, in the church—because sometimes you will be wrong, unless you're never wrong. "Was I wrong, honey?" "No, all that, woman, tell you that, woman." And the consequences of your pride—or my pride—in refusing to admit that we're wrong is huge.



I remember years ago, I heard of a survey of teenagers that was taken, and they were asked, "If you could change any two things about your father, what would they be? Any two things about your father, what would they be?" They said, number one, that he wouldn't get so angry, and number two, that he would admit it when he's wrong. We refuse to admit that we're wrong because of pride, because of insecurity. You know, a secure person doesn't find it that hard to admit they're wrong, because an insecure person thinks that people will think less of them if they say they're wrong, when in actuality, people admire you more if you're willing to admit that you're wrong. It's just contrary to the way our mind works. You fathers—the quicker you are to acknowledge that you're wrong to your children, the more they admire you for that. Listen, they know you're wrong. Your wife knows you're wrong. Get over it. Get over it.



**Third and last application:** Try to always hold communion as an extremely sacred and holy observance, on very holy ground. You are standing at the foot of the cross, looking at your Savior dying for you. Be focused on the fact that Jesus was beaten and mocked and tortured and suffered for you—for you personally and individually. And in a way that we cannot comprehend, He actually suffered the hell that you would have suffered had He not taken your place.

