

09.07.25: 1 Cor 11:17-33

Unity in the Lord's Supper

Scripture: 1 Cor 11:17-33 (or 34a?)

Intro:

- Text that we often go to for Lord's Supper but rarely if ever deal with the whole context, and for good reason
- Let us consider some applications for us as we come to the Lord's table this morning

Background to understanding what was going on and why Paul is so harsh in his condemnation to the Church of Corinth, specifically what was the nature of the abuse and misuse of the Lord's Supper? Centers around two challenges:

- Difficulties in the text itself – ambiguous nature of Paul's language
 - Translation of “eats his own supper” vs “goes ahead and eats”
- Difficulties in our understanding of the sociological context of the Greek/Roman world in the 1st century
 - No church buildings so meeting in houses and assume they met in large meaning houses of well to do
 - Distinct socioeconomic classes / divisions
 - These houses had a formal dining room, but not a large one – could only seat a few guests
 - Others would be seated in the atrium
 - So perhaps the hosts were accommodating their rich or distinguished guests with meals that were far superior in both quality and quantity compared with those not in the inner circle

Stolen from Craig Blomberg who stole it from Michael Green, “Michael Green gives an excellent sixfold summary of the theology of the Lord's Supper that Paul stresses in verses 17–34:”

Look Back (to Christ's death):

- Vs. 23 – for I received from the Lord what I passed on to you
- Received in sense of handing down of tradition – from the Lord to those witnesses and through them to others
- As with all traditions, we must remind ourselves of the “why” or the “why” gets lost in the Baptist mantra of “we've just always done it that way” and tradition becomes tradition for tradition's sake.

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- The language here helps us tremendously as Paul repeats the same verb
 - I passed on or handed over to you
 - Jesus was passed on or handed over for us
 - Even as the disciples were sharing this last meal with Jesus, the wheels were set in motion and those who would have Jesus killed were busy executing their plot
 - But the important and simple reminder that Jesus gave himself willingly for us
- Romans 5:6-10

⁶For while we were still helpless, at the right time, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷For rarely will someone die for a just person—though for a good person perhaps someone might even dare to die. ⁸But God proves his own love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹How much more then, since we have now been justified by his blood, will we be saved through him from wrath. ¹⁰For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, then how much more, having been reconciled, will we be saved by his life.

Look Up (fellowship with God):

- Implicit in the text and context of the local church and the prerequisite for fellowship with the local church
- Common bonding experience of salvation through Jesus and reconciliation with God as a component of that salvation
- We were alienated (separated); in open rebellion, dead; in darkness; slaves to sin
- We have become reconciled, in relationship, alive, children of light, slaves to righteousness
- Before there can be any true fellowship with one another, we must have fellowship individually with God

Look In (in self-examination):

- Vs 28 – let a person examine himself or herself
- Vs 31 – if we are properly judging ourselves then we will not need to be judged
- Important – to search our hearts and examine ourselves as we come to the table together

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- But I must admit/confess that I have missed the main thrust of this – that of unity

Look Around (fellowship with each other):

- This gets to the heart of this passage and the explanation of Paul's forcefulness in dealing with the Corinthians
- Throughout this letter he has been dealing with divisions in the church in Corinth
- 1:10-13a
¹⁰ Now I urge you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree in what you say, that there be no divisions among you, and that you be united with the same understanding and the same conviction. ¹¹ For it has been reported to me about you, my brothers and sisters, by members of Chloe's people, that there is rivalry among you. ¹² What I am saying is this: One of you says, "I belong to Paul," or "I belong to Apollos," or "I belong to Cephas," or "I belong to Christ." ¹³ Is Christ divided?
- Now I'm not saying that the divisions in the Lord's supper were along the same lines as in ch 1, but the essence of the divisions is the same, the emphasis of any smaller group over the collective church.
- Satan is having a field day and wreaking havoc in our churches by this very thing – divisions.
 - We are divided generationally
 - We are divided racially
 - We are divided ethnically
 - We are divided politically
 - We are divided by worship preference in worship style
 - We are divided socio-economically
 - We are divided by gender
 - We are divided in our divisions
- and all of our divisions are non-biblical – they are the importation of the world's divisions into the church
- and brothers and sisters, this should not be! When we are saved out of the world, we are saved out of all of the categories and labels of the world and into the church. We are no longer identified by/as those other things, but as members of one church.

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- Eph 4
Therefore I, the prisoner in the Lord, urge you to walk worthy of the calling you have received, ²with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, ³making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. ⁴There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope^c at your calling—⁵one Lord, one faith, one baptism, ⁶one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all.
- Unity is the emphasis of this entire passage – this is what is captured in their “coming together not for what is better but for what is worse” and the culminating “therefore” in vs 33 “my brothers and sisters, when you come toher to eat, welcome one another [or wait for one another]”
- In other words do so in unity, not with divisions
- APPLICATION: let there be no disunity among us as we come to this table.

Look Forward (to Christ's return):

- Vs 26 – as often as we do this, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes
- Jesus's death was not the end, but the beginning of the end
- As we share this meal together, we are reminded of our salvation and that salvation has all of a past, present, and future component to it
- Paul understood that the creation of the church was a formation of God's people who bear his name who look forward to his consummation of all that has begun with Christ's first coming but will be completed with his second coming
- And we will share the sweet fellowship of unity around the heavenly banquet table, our seats purchased by our savior

Look Outward (to proclaim God's word to others):

- Vs 26 also – the meal as proclamation
- Proclamation