

**8/24/25**

**Instructions for Celebrating the Lord's Supper**  
**1 Corinthians 11:17–34**

**Cornerstone Introduction...**

**Read: 1 Corinthians 11:17–34**

**Sermon Introduction**

Several years ago, a show called “Brain Games” conducted an experiment on human behavior and conformity. The experiment involved a woman who entered a full waiting room at an eye doctor’s office. She believed she was going to receive a free eye exam.

Everyone in the waiting room was an actor. After checking in with the receptionist and sitting down, a bell rang. All the actors got out of their chair, stood there, and then sat back down. Every time the bell rang, the actors would stand up again, pause, and then sit back down.

At first, the woman looked puzzled, but by the third ring of the bell, she began to stand up and sit with everyone else. Then, one by one, the actors were being called back to the doctor, until she was left completely alone. The bell rang, no one else was around, but she still stood up and sat back down.

Then, new man entered the waiting room. He was another participant in the experiment, not an actor. When the bell rang, she stood up and sat down, and the new guy looked at her confused. The next time the bell rang, she did the routine, and he asked her “Why are you doing that?”

She replied, “I don’t know, everyone was doing it, and I thought I just had to do it.” The next time the bell rang, he joined her. The experiment continued until the room was filled with new participants (not actors) all standing and sitting every time the bell rang.

That experiment illustrates how easily we can fall into doing things simply because it is what everyone else is doing, or because it is what we’ve always done. We can go through the motions without ever asking, “Why am I doing this? What is the meaning behind this?”

The Apostle Paul confronts this very real danger in 1 Corinthians 11:17–34. The Corinthian church was gathering for the Lord’s Supper, but they had turned it into a hollow ritual. The act of remembering Christ’s sacrifice had lost its true meaning.

**Main Point:** In 1 Corinthians 11:17–34, Paul gives three crucial sets of instructions that you must know to participate in the Lord’s Supper in a worthy manner.

**Outline:**

**Approach the Lord's Supper with Regard for the Church (17–22)**

**Approach the Lord's Supper with Remembrance of Christ (23–26)**

**Approach the Lord's Supper with Reverent Self-Examination (27–34)**

**I. Approach the Lord's Supper with Regard for the Church (17–22)**

Look with me in your Bible at verse 17: **“But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse.”**

In verse 2, Paul commended the Corinthians for remembering him and holding fast to the teaching he had given them. As he addresses this new issue, he says, **“in giving this instruction, I do not praise you.”** He repeats this statement in verse 22.

Paul is clear that he does not approve of their behavior. He says when they come together, it is not for the **“better,”** but for the **“worse.”** It is not for the benefit and building up of one another, rather its harming one another.

Paul is now about to describe their gatherings. He points out two kinds of divisions in this section. One that must be corrected, and another that seems to be unavoidable. Let us begin with the first in verse 18. He writes, **“For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you;”**

The word translated **“divisions”** (schismata) refers to separate groups that can be caused by disagreement, disputes, quarreling, jealousy, selfish ambition, personal preferences, etc. This shouldn't come as a surprise to us. Paul has already addressed their tendency toward divisions in chapters 1–4.

Paul had urged them in **1:10**, **“Now I exhort you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all agree and that there be no divisions among you...”**

Now in chapters 1–4 the divisions were theological in nature. But here we find out that the divisions are sociological. The wealthier believers were separating themselves from the poorer believers in the gathering.

Paul then makes a general statement about divisions in verse 19, saying, **“and in part I believe it. For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you.”**

The word translated **“factions”** (*hairesis*) literally refers to the dividing of people into opposing groups. It carries the sense of a willful choosing of one’s own way, independent of rightful authority. This word emphasizes the attitude and mindset that produces such divisions.

Our English word “heresy” comes directly from this Greek word, but here Paul is not addressing false teaching as much as he is the spirit of division and dissension. These factions arise from selfishness, selfish ambition, and self-will rather than love for the body of Christ.

Sadly, until Christ returns, there will always be people who seek to stir up division within the body of Christ. Scripture warns us about such individuals.

**Titus 3:10–11 “Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned.”**

**Romans 16:17–18 “Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.”**

These types of individuals are self-willed. They are driven to gather a following for themselves, refusing to submit to the authority God has established. Their arrogance and self-righteous spirit produce factions, destroy the unity Christ purchased for His church.

Yet even in this, Paul recognizes God’s divine purpose in using factions within the church. God uses such divisions **“so that those who are approved may become evident among you.”** The word **“approved”** means those who have been tested and proven genuine in their faith.

In contrast, believers are called to be peaceable, gentle, humble, faithful and loving to one another. Those who walk in this manner demonstrate their abiding trust in the Lord and that their lives have been refined by God.

In this way, factions reveal who truly belongs to Christ and, by contrast, expose those who do not.

Now we see the full picture of the division in verses 20–21. Let’s look there: **“Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord’s Supper, for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk.”**

Paul makes it clear that while the Corinthians were eating the bread and drinking the cup, they were not genuinely partaking in the Lord’s Supper. Divisions, partiality, selfishness, and

drunkenness corrupted their gatherings. Because sin and disregard for the body marked the meal, it ceased to reflect the unity and love that the Lord's Supper was intended to display.

When we read this, we are likely surprised by their actions and maybe even tempted to think we are above this. But we need to understand the "why" behind what they were doing.

The Corinthians were, in effect, feasting like the world around them. The Roman culture placed emphasis on status and the social hierarchy. Even Roman homes were constructed to reinforce social distinctions through the architecture.

Guests of higher status (nobility, wealthy, wise, elite, accomplished in the world's eyes, etc.) dined in the large dining room with couches called the triclinium. Those in the triclinium enjoyed the best food and the best service.

Those of a lower status (poor, uneducated, slaves, those who were looked down on) ate in the nearby atrium. The atrium was like someone's front porch. Those who ate there and were typically given lower quality food, smaller portions, and in some instances scraps. This is why Paul says, **"one goes hungry."**

Another feature of Romans feasts was that they usually included excessive drinking, hence Paul's comment about **"another is drunk."**

Instead of the Lord's Supper serving as a remembrance of Christ and an expression of love, care, and unity within His body, the Corinthians turned it into a display of social hierarchy and worldly indulgence in feasting and drinking

Verse 22 captures Paul's pastoral indignation to all this: **What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you."**

Paul is shocked. He is appalled by their actions. He frames his response with a series of rhetorical questions to expose the obvious error of their behavior. If some wanted to eat and drink selfishly, it would have been far better for them to do so in their own homes. By bringing such conduct into the church and into the Lord's Supper, they showed blatant disregard for the body of Christ.

Paul cannot praise them; he cannot endorse or approve what they are doing. Their actions are completely contrary to the gospel. They have taken a sacred ordinance given by Jesus Himself to commemorate His selfless, sacrificial love and turned it into an occasion of selfish indulgence, gluttony, drunkenness, and division.

**Imagine you family gathered for Thanksgiving. The whole point of the holiday is to come together in gratitude, to share the blessings God has given, and to enjoy fellowship as one family. But instead of the whole family coming together there is division and separation.**

**Some of the family who arrive first don't care for the rest of the family, so they begin eating and drinking. By the time the rest of the family arrives, there is little food left some have almost nothing. What was supposed to be a meal of unity and thanksgiving has been turned into a display of selfishness and disregard for one another.**

**That is exactly what was happening in Corinth. The Lord's Supper was given by Christ as a time of remembering His body given for us, His blood shed for us. That remembrance was intended to produce a display of love and unity among His people. But the Corinthians turned it into something entirely different.**

As we seek to apply this text, it's important that we take to heart the principles here. Now, we don't celebrate the Lord's Supper in the exact same way as the Corinthians did. For us, it isn't a full meal, so there isn't really an opportunity for people to go hungry by not taking it. Also, as far as I know nobody can get drunk off Welches grape juice.

But what is the heart of what Paul is saying here? The Corinthians had no regard, no concern, no regard for one another in the body of Christ when they took communion. We have to ask ourselves: do we do the same thing?

Do take communion while fostering division in the church? Do we take communion while not being in unity with one another? Do we take communion without seeking reconciliation within the body where possible? These are important questions to ask.

## **II. Approach the Lord's Supper with Remembrance of Christ (23–26)**

Look with me at verse 23: **“For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you,”**

Paul begins by reminding the Corinthians that the teaching he gave them about the Lord's Supper was not his own invention but came from Christ Himself. The Corinthians needed to understand that to disregard or distort this practice was to show disregard to the Lord.

Paul continues, **“that the Lord Jesus in the night in which 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.”**

The actions of taking bread, giving thanks, and breaking the bread reflect the ordinary beginning of the Passover meal. According to God's command, the Passover was practiced as a memorial of Israel's redemption out of Egypt.

**Exodus 12:14, “Now this day will be a memorial to you, and you shall celebrate it as a feast to the Lord...”**

And in **Deuteronomy 16:3**, the Lord tells Israel that the bread in the meal was given “...so that you may remember all the days of your life the day when you came out of the land of Egypt.”

But what is incredible here is that Jesus says that the bread symbolizes His body. In doing so, He reveals that the Passover was not only a remembrance of Israel’s deliverance from Egypt but also a foreshadowing of Himself and the greater deliverance. He is declaring that He is true Redeemer who brings the greater and ultimate redemption.

And notice how He says the bread is His body, “**Which is for you.**” With these words He speaks of His willing and voluntary surrender to death. He is declaring, “this is for you,” “this is My voluntary gift for you.”

**Mark 14:34–36 “And He said to them, “My soul is deeply grieved to the point of death; remain here and keep watch.”<sup>35</sup> And He went a little beyond *them*, and fell to the ground and *began* to pray that if it were possible, the hour might pass Him by.<sup>36</sup> And He was saying, “Abba! Father! All things are possible for You; remove this cup from Me; yet not what I will, but what You will.”**

Jesus died on your behalf. He died in your place. He bore the penalty you deserved. Yet it is important to note that the “**you**” here is plural. Jesus’ body was given for His people, His church, His bride.

Therefore, when we come to the Lord’s Table, we must resist the tendency to see Communion only in a hyper-individualized sense. Yes, we rejoice in what Christ has done for us personally, but we must also rejoice in what He has done for us corporately. The Supper reminds us that we are one body, redeemed together by one Savior.

Jesus commanded, “**do this in remembrance of Me.**” He repeats these same words in the next verse after explaining the cup. In Scripture, the command to remember was never intended to merely be a mental exercise.

To remember meant not only to recall but to live in light of what was remembered. It was to meditate on that specific event and truth, and to allow that to shape and transform your life. Remembering was designed to ensure that your life aligned with the reality of that event.

While on this point, it is important to highlight that Jesus is telling us to do this as a remembrance of Him. The blessing and grace of this ordinance is in the remembering of Christ and His sacrifice.

Jesus, nor any of the Scriptures, say that the bread and wine are transformed into Jesus' body and blood and that consuming them imparts some mystical grace (Catholicism). And Jesus doesn't say that the bread and the wine will somehow have His presence "in, with, and under" the bread and wine and that consuming them imparts some mystical grace (Lutherans).

No, Jesus says eat the bread and the wine and do this in remembrance of me. It is the remembrance of Christ, it is the remembrance of the gospel, it is the remembrance of His sacrifice of love on your behalf that God reminds us of the grace that is ours in Christ.

Now let's look at verse 25. There it reads, **"In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.'**"

At the close of the Passover meal, Jesus took the cup and declared it to be **"the new covenant in My blood."** With these words, He was connecting His death to the fulfillment of God's promises in the Old Testament.

First, His words connect to Jeremiah 31:31–34, which is a prophetic passage on the new covenant. The old covenant was not intended to be an everlasting covenant. Rather, it was used revealed our sinfulness and pointed us to our need for a Savior.

It was revealed to the prophet Jeremiah that a new and better covenant was coming. A covenant in which God's law would be written on the heart, His people would have true and personal knowledge of Him, and where their sins would be removed and completely forgiven.

But when speaking of this new covenant, Jesus said that it would be established **"in My blood."** In Scripture, blood represents a life that is given up in sacrifice. As Jesus said in **Matthew 26:28, "for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins."**

Every time we partake of the Lord's Supper, we are reminded that we are the beneficiaries of this new covenant. Christ's death has secured for us the full forgiveness of sins. His sacrifice has cleansed us and enabled us to know and serve the living God. And His work has guaranteed us the promise of an eternal inheritance.

Do you see how incredible your Savior is? Do you understand how participating in the Lord's Supper is designed to exalt Christ and to rekindle our hearts to a great appreciation and love for Him and what He has done for us?

Paul isn't finished yet, look at verse 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 is more than an act of private devotion. It is a visible testimony, a corporate proclamation of the cross of Christ. Each time we gather and take Communion, we are declaring to one another and to the world that salvation is found in Christ alone, that His death is sufficient for our redemption, and that He is coming again in glory.

**Some years ago, theologian Michael Horton wrote a book entitled "Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church." In it, he warned against reducing Christianity to a moralistic self-help program.**

**His concern was that it is impossible to truly be a Christian without treasuring Christ Himself and making Him the center of our faith and life. The danger comes when we treat Christianity merely as a pathway to a better life, a tool for self-improvement, a way to ease our conscience, or a means of personal gain.**

**Christ must remain our first love. His life, His teaching, His sacrifice must be our daily meditation. He must be our greatest treasure. His will must be our delight. And His Lordship must be the defining mark of our lives.**

**Brothers and sisters, may we take Horton's words to heart. We can never live out a Christless Christianity. And in light of Paul's words here in this passage, we should never participate in a Christless Communion.**

In remembering Christ through the Lord's Supper, our hearts are lifted to a higher view of our Savior. And as we truly meditate on Him in this ordinance, there is also a sanctifying effect. To remember Christ rightly is to desire to follow His example.

In beholding His beauty and glory in giving Himself selflessly for us, and we are moved to be selfless toward one another. And just as Jesus devoted His life to proclaiming the good news, so too should we be devoted to proclaiming His life, death, burial, and resurrection.

### **III. Approach the Lord's Supper with Reverent Self-Examination (27–34)**

Paul writes in verse 27: **"Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord."**

One important thing to note about this verse is that the word **“unworthy”** in the Greek is not an adjective, it is an adverb. If it was an adjective it would function to describe the person taking Communion. But it is an adverb, which modifies the verb, or the act of taking Communion.

So, Paul’s concern here is not that anyone could ever be “worthy” in themselves to partake because none of us are. Rather, his warning is about the **“manner”** in which one partakes.

The Corinthians were partaking in an **“unworthy manner”** because their behavior contradicted the very reality the Supper declares. Instead of displaying the unity and self-giving love of Christ, they were humiliating the poor, dividing the body, and turning the Lord’s Table into a selfish feast.

In doing so, they showed disregard for Christ’s body and His blood shed. To eat and drink in such a way is to treat the cross of Christ lightly and to despise the meaning of His sacrifice.

What is the solution to this? Look at verse 28: **“But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup.”**

The key word here is **“examine.”** This does not mean we must make ourselves “worthy” to come to the Table. Rather, it means we are to take an honest look at our hearts and conduct before the Lord.

The idea is one of making a critical examination of something to determine genuineness, or to put to the test. Like Paul says in **2 Corinthians 13:5**, **“Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?”**

So, examination is a call to confession, repentance, and a realignment of our lives with Christ.

Notice also that Paul says, **“and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup.”** The goal of examination is not to discourage participation but to ensure that we come in humility, repentance, and faith. Self-examination prepares us to partake with reverence and gratitude, not to abstain in fear.

But notice the warning Paul gives in verse 29: **“For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly.”**

To approach the Lord’s Supper without self-examination and right judgment is to eat and drink in an unworthy manner. It is to come carelessly, thoughtlessly, or inconsiderately. When we come to the table without self-examination and right judgment (in light of the Scriptures), we are inviting God’s discipline.

Paul continues in verse 30: **“For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.”**

Here Paul makes plain that God’s judgment had already fallen on the Corinthians. Some were becoming weak because of their sinful approach to the Supper, others were suffering physical illness, and some had even been taken in death.

This demonstrates how seriously God regards this ordinance in the church. Now to be clear, the phrase **“fall asleep”** is consistently used in the New Testament as a metaphor for the death of believers.

It is never applied to unbelievers. Thus Paul is not speaking here of final condemnation, but of a fatherly, disciplinary judgment. God’s discipline, even when severe, is corrective rather than destructive.

Paul again stresses the need of self-examination in verse 31: **“But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged.”** In other words, honest self-examination, right judgment and repentance would remove the need for our discipline.

But Paul’s words in verse 32 remind us of the purpose of God’s discipline: **“But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world.”**

He reminds the Corinthians that God’s discipline is not His abandonment. Rather it’s the loving correction of a Father. It is designed to produce holiness, guard us from sin, and keep us from being swept away in the final judgment of the world.

As **Psalm 94:12** says, **“Blessed is the man whom you discipline, O Lord, and whom you teach out of your law.”** Likewise, in Proverbs 3:11–12 it says, **“My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline or be weary of his reproof, <sup>12</sup> for the Lord reproves him whom he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.”** (cf. Deut. 8:5; Job 5:17–18; Rev. 3:19).

So, even the painful discipline of the Lord is evidence of His love and a safeguard for His children. By humbling ourselves in self-judgment, we avoid the heavier hand of divine judgment, and by submitting to His discipline, we are preserved for eternal life rather than condemned with the world.

Paul concludes with his final instruction in verses 33–34: **“So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so**

**that you will not come together for judgment. The remaining matters I will arrange when I come.”**

As Paul rebuked the Corinthians, he reminded them that the Lord’s Supper was not just another meal. It was given by Jesus Himself as a sacred ordinance to remember His body given and His blood shed for sinners. To abuse this meal was to miss the very heart of the gospel.

Judgment is what we all deserve because of our sin. Yet the sinless Son of God came took the penalty for our sin. The Scriptures tell us that Christ was the propitiation for our sins (Romans 3:25; Hebrews 2:17; 1 John 2:2; 4:10). Do you know what that means?

That means that Christ took all the sins of all His people that they would ever commit, and He bore them and then took the wrath of God for all of those sins. The word propitiation carries the meaning of satisfaction. That means that Jesus took the full wrath of God for our sins until the wrath of God against our sins was fully satisfied.

We can’t even begin to imagine the pain of the curse that He endured in our place. And yet He said, “this is my body given for you, this is my blood poured out for you.” He died, was buried, rose again, and is returning soon.

If you have come to believe this, may Communion be a sweet remembrance of these realities. If you haven’t come to believe this and you are here this morning, see Christ and His offer of mercy, repent and put your faith and trust in Him alone to make you right before God.

Let’s Pray.

**Benediction: Hebrews 13:20–21, “Now the God of peace, who brought up from the dead the great Shepherd of the sheep through the blood of the eternal covenant, *even* Jesus our Lord, equip you in every good thing to do His will, working in us that which is pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom *be* the glory forever and ever. Amen.”**