

The Secret to a Vibrant Christian Life

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

INTRODUCTION: Historians tell us that there are many different ways to look at History.

- A series of great people
- A series of great places
- A series of great events

But another way to view History, at least biblically is as a series of meals.

- In the Garden of Eden, Gen. 3 - FALL
- In Egypt, the Passover in Exodus 12 – FREEDOM
- In Jerusalem, The Lord’s Supper in Matthew 26 – FORGIVENESS
- In Heaven at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb – Rev - FOREVER

So recorded human history begins with a meal and ends with a meal and it has two major meals in between.

CONTEXT: The ancients in general and the Corinthians in particular viewed meals very differently than we do. They lived in a time when the threat of famine was real. They all had family members who had died of starvation.

So to eat was more than just a necessity - it was a sacred thing. Then there were special meals that were associated with one’s religion. We’ve already talked about, “food sacrificed to idols”. Well the Christian equivalent to that is the Lord’s Supper.

It was a vital, meaningful, powerful, expression of your worship.

In today’s text we can learn a great deal about how to do communion well and get the full benefit.. and we can learn a great deal about the early church.

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 11:17–34 (ESV)

17 But in the following instructions I do not commend you,

So Paul is warning them, buckle up a reproof is coming. Tuck your feet under your seat, lest you lose a toe.

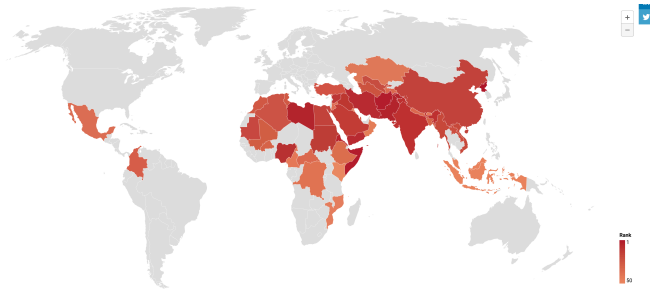
17b. because *when you come together* it is not for the better but for the worse.

A couple of insights here - First, notice that they came together regularly. Christianity is designed to be a team sport.

A relationship with Jesus Christ is supposed to be deeply fulfilling, to such a degree that you would gladly die for your faith. And thousands did in the first century, and thousands die for their faith today.

Consider that in the last 100 there have been more Christian martyrs than in the previous 2000 years combined.

The Most Dangerous Places to Follow Jesus



- Every day, 13 Christians worldwide are killed because of their faith.
- Every day, 12 churches or Christian buildings are attacked.
- And every day, 12 Christians are unjustly arrested or imprisoned, and another 5 are abducted.

So don't worry so much about being canceled on social media - many of our brothers and sisters around the world are being cancelled from life.

We have reports in modern days and in the ancient times of Christians dying with great joy. If you want to read these amazing stories check out **Foxes's Book of Martyrs**.

Now consider - what is it that enabled believers to face death with joy? Well, there are several things that would contribute to it, but chief among them is that they were able to flourish and experience deep fulfillment in their faith.

One of the keys to deeply enjoying your faith is the **life giving nature** of the corporate gathering.

Two things are essential for a strong and vibrant walk with God - Solitude and Solidarity.

You **MUST** have time alone with God where you really press into Him, allowing him to minister to you, edit you, correct you, feed you.

You **MUST** also have regular times where you come together with other believers in a sincere, authentic way. That means you really get to know people, you serve them, you allow them to see the best aspects of your life, and those aspects you are still working on.

The writer to the Hebrews puts it this way...Hebrews 10:24–25 (ESV)

²⁴ And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, ²⁵ **not neglecting to meet together**, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

It is virtually impossible to experience the fullness of God apart from authentic Christian fellowship.

As your solitude (time alone with God) and your solidarity (authentic time with your church family) goes... so goes the vitality of your faith.

NOW - a life giving, healthy church, doesn't mean that we never deal with sin and talk frankly about areas of compromise. This very text is a rebuke and a reproof. He is calling them out.

NOTHING is more essential for your spiritual flourishing than the right person, at the right time, in the right way looking you in the eye and telling you - I love you and you are wrong.

- **There will be a day in your future when you will need to reprove someone.**
- **There will also be a day in your future when someone will need to reprove you.**

Start preparing for both experiences. Here is what I mean - ***if you have kids***, it is part of the job description that you are to rebuke, correct, discipline them. So start today investing in them, earning their trust, loving them... knowing the day will come that you need to have a sit down.

The same is true for ***people in your church***. Start today, investing in people, earning their trust, loving them... so that when you need to have a sit down, they do not question your heart motive.

Also, begin today preparing your heart for the time when someone needs to correct you. Don't raise the defenses. Listen, ask yourself if there is truth to what they say. Is their concern legitimate? It is biblical?

A correction taken rightly, could save your life, could save your marriage, could be the difference between a healthy relationship with your kids or perpetual disenfranchisement.

So, Paul says when you come together... is should be for edification, building up, which will at times include a loving correction...but at the church at Corinth... that was not the case. People left worse than they came. **WHY?**

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.

Two words mentioned there -

- **Divisions** - It's the Greek word **Schisma** - σχίσμα, ατος, τό(σχίζω; Aristot. et al.; 'split, division') It means to be divided because of conflict.

- **Factions** - αἵρεσις [**haire-sis** /hah·ee·res·is/] - It is where we get our word, Heresy. So this indicates the division, the schism, is doctrinal in nature.

So this isn't referring to clicks per se, it isn't referring to first service versus second service. Or Senior versus Teenagers.

But rather, a belief that has led to division.

²⁰ When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat.

This schism was never more evident than it was at the Lord's Supper.

SEVEN OBSERVATIONS ABOUT THE EARLY CHURCH.

1. **They gathered officially on Sunday**, the Lord's Day. Now, throughout the week they would also gather house to house. But Sunday was the day of worship for the Christians. Why?

- Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week.
- Jesus first met his disciples after the resurrection on the first day of the week.
- Jesus met to worship with his disciples on several occasion always on the first day of the week.
- Jesus first imparted the Holy Spirit to his disciples (blowing on them) on the first day of the week.
- The full coming of the Holy Spirit to the church was on the first day of the week.
- Jesus gave the great commission on the first day of the week.
- Jesus ascended to Heaven on the first day of the week.
- The first gospel sermon ever preached was on the first day of the week.
- Christians were called upon to give their financial offerings on the first day of the week-- I Cor. 16:1-2.
- Every occasion of Early Church Worship we have in the NT was on the first day of the week.

Now, the Lord's Day gathering was descriptive not prescriptive. So there is not a verse that says, "You must only gather on Sunday's". There are churches who have a Saturday night gathering, it's not sinful to do that. It's just not the pattern we have in the text.

2. **It appears, they gathered in the evenings, rather than Sunday morning.**

Notice it is called, "The Lord's SUPPER" not the Lord's Breakfast.

Remember, Sunday was a work day in the Greco/Roman world. It was much later when Christianity became the dominant religion that Sundays were treated differently. In our country we had a strong population of Jews and Christians, thus we have a weekend. But this is the historic exception not the rule.

3. **The Lord's Supper in the Early Church was taken each week.**

We know this from extra biblical literature. Now again, there is not a passage that says it should be this way. Jesus said, “as often as you do this, do this in remembrance of me”.

So, he was more concerned with HOW we take communion rather than WHEN we take communion.

Nevertheless, it seems it was a weekly occurrence in the Early Church.

4. The Lord’s Supper was used something like we use the “invitation”

It was a time to cleanse one’s conscience, confess one’s sins, make peace with our neighbor. Then to sit down in unity and feast of the benefits of the Gospel

Imagine experiencing that every week. It could be a very healthy thing if done well.

5. Real wine was used for the Lord’s Supper

Now, we are not going to do that. But I want you to understand that they did. The text will not make sense if you don’t understand that.

You see, any sweet juice left alone long enough will ferment and have some measure of alcohol.

During the Prohibition Era, **Dr. Welch** developed a method of pasteurizing grape juice very specifically for communion services. That’s why we have welches grape juice today.

But it is silly to suggest that the early church used grape juice, grape vines bear fruit in season, they are harvested and the fermentation process begins. If they celebrated communion every Sunday of the year, they had real wine.

NOW - why am I pointing this out?

6. The ceremonial observation of the Lord’s supper was preceded by a large meal.

That’s one way we know they were baptist, they ate every Sunday. Someone else said, but wait they were presbyterians because they used real wine. HA!

Jude 12 refers to this meal as the, “Love feast”. It was very simply a pot luck meal, followed by a more ceremonial time of communion.

That is exactly what we do at our Thanksgiving Meal each year.

7. The Wealthy members would arrive early, eat all the food and drink all the wine.

So the working class would work hard all day, anticipating the feast at church.... But when they finally arrived the wealthier folks had eaten all the food a couple of them even got drunk.

So that is what Paul is addressing...

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.

So Paul is furious with this church for the way they are behaving. Why? Well, their self centeredness was robbing the Lord's Supper of its power and failure to properly observe the Lord's supper was at the root of why there were so many issues in the church.

So Paul points them back to very first communion -

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.

Those three verses are weighty - I have referred to it as a Spiritual GPS.

GPS is possible because of the principle of triangulation and trilateration. Basically your GPS device or phone, receives signal from at least three different satellites. It performs a quick calculation and determines where you are on the planet relative to your distance from three points.

Well the Lord's Supper does the same in a Spiritual Sense.

- It looks BACK into the past to the actual crucifixion of Jesus. We, "remember" the shed blood and torn body of Jesus.
- We do this in the PRESENT - through literally eating the bread and drinking the wine as we remember.
- And we consider that He is coming again in the FUTURE.

It gives us the opportunity to feast on the benefits of the Gospel in real time, while seeing ourselves in the midst of a glorious, unfolding drama.

If we get it right - it is a powerful experience.
 If we get it wrong - it is extremely dangerous.

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. ³¹ But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged.

³² But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. ³³ So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for 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.

CONCLUSION/INVITATION: For the Early Church, as they came together the Lord's Supper was basically their invitation. Before they dared let a morsel of bread pass over their lips, they made sure they were right with God.

For us, that is what the invitation is all about. That is why we treat this portion of our service with a measure of sobriety.

Listen, if you need to slip out, do it as soon as I call for every head bowed and every eye closed... when people are making eternal decisions don't make them dodge you because you want to get to lunch sooner. It's rude, its wrong.

What if God speaks to you during this time of invitation and you neglect it? Friend, it's a very serious thing. If the Creator of the Universe tells you to get right, you better do it.

A failure to do so, is to invite judgement. It's judgement on you personally and on us corporately...

So love God enough, love yourself enough, and love us enough - to respond to Jesus if he speaks.