

Understanding the Lord's Supper

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

August 9, 2026

HDBC

This morning we are going to take a one-week break from our current sermon series. We have scheduled the Lord's Supper as part of our worship this morning. Rather than adding it as an extra element to our current series, I felt that it would be good to make it the focal point.

For those who may be visiting and unfamiliar with the phrase, let me offer a quick summary of what I'm speaking about. What we call ***the Lord's Supper***, is sometimes called ***communion***. In the New Testament it is often referred to simply as ***breaking bread***. It involves the eating of a small portion of bread and the drinking of a small cup of juice.

These are symbolic acts primarily designed to remind us of the sacrifice made by Jesus when He died on the cross. The bread is a symbol of His body and the juice is a symbol of His blood. We do this from time to time because Jesus told us to do so. It is written about primarily in Matthew, Mark, Luke and 1 Corinthians. Today we will focus on 1 Corinthians 11.

Before we get into the text, let me offer some simply bullet points.

1. The Lord's Supper was initiated by Jesus the night before he died.
2. It was formed out of the Jewish Passover celebration.
3. It is for Christians, those who have trusted Jesus as Lord/Savior.
4. No one should feel compelled to partake. Guests, don't feel uneasy.
5. We generally participate together, as a church. I'll guide you.

Seven things the Lord's Supper does.

1. Challenges division and disunity. (17-22)

The early church shared meals together in what we would call potluck fashion. These were referred to as *love feasts*. The Lord's Supper would take place at the end of the main meal.

In Corinth, an unhealthy and sinful trend had developed, which Paul addressed in this letter. These were often hosted by the wealthier members of the church. Their friends would arrive early for fellowship and the meal. Many of the poorer members of the church had to work longer hours and would often arrive much later. Sometimes they would find very little if any food left for them to eat. In addition to that, some would have consumed so much wine that they were drunk when it came time for the Lord's supper. Verses 20-21.

This was a perversion of the Lord's Supper and was creating division and disunity in the church. Paul made it clear that this was not to be praised and was dishonoring to Christ and unhealthy for the church.

The Lord's Supper was to be a time of unity and togetherness for the church. It was designed lead believers to set aside any disagreements or offenses and come together as one. Essentially, Paul was saying it is impossible to truly worship God in the act of the Lord Supper while in a state of disunity and division.

*Are you united with other believers? Is there division, disunity?
When you come to the Lord's Supper, you must deal with it.*

2. Points to the death of Jesus. (23-25)

Notice that Paul is writing from direct revelation. He received it directly from Jesus. **1 Corinthians** was one of the earlier books of the N.T. written. Likely written before any of the Gospels. If that is true, this was the first set of instructions given for what we call The Lord's Supper. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John each share its beginning.

Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper while celebrating the Passover with His disciples on the night in which He was betrayed. It is not accidental or incidental that it is tied to the Passover. The Passover celebrated the greatest acts of deliverance in the Old Testament. The Lord's Supper celebrates the greatest act of deliverance in the New Testament.

Passover – deliverance of Israel from Egypt under Moses.

Lord's Supper – deliverance from sin through Jesus.

Passover – death of a lamb, blood covered their sins and protected.

Lord's Supper – death of Jesus, his blood covered our sins.

Passover – included bread and wine and bitter herbs.

Lord's Supper – pictures body and blood of Jesus.

As Jesus celebrated Passover with His disciples only hours before his betrayal, He broke with tradition and brought new meaning to old symbols. In doing so created a new ceremony. Jesus changed the focus and meaning. It would focus on the death of Christ for us!

The bread was broken, as His body would be broken.

The wine was consumed, as His blood would be poured out.

On that night, against a backdrop of deception and wickedness the beauty of God's grace was displayed through the initiation of the Lord's Supper. In the midst of Satan's worst we see God's best.

3. Affirms the reality of the new covenant. (25)

Under the old covenant the Hebrew people observed Passover year after year. In introducing the Lord's Supper Jesus declared that a new covenant was now in effect. The new covenant would not be ratified through the sacrifices of bulls, goats and lambs, but through His own death.

Under the old covenant the sacrifices had to continue to be offered. Those would become unnecessary under the new covenant, but His death and resurrection were enough to secure our salvation for all time.

Under the old covenant the high priest had to enter the holy of holies once a year to bring the blood of an animal. Under the new covenant, Jesus presented His own blood one time. And it was enough.

4. Declares the good news. (26)

Notice that when we share in the Lord's supper we **proclaim** the death of Jesus. That is the normal word that is used for declaring or heralding good news. **As A. T. Robertson said, *The Lord's Supper is the great preacher of the death of Christ.***

The ceremony of the Lord's Supper is a sermon about the death of Christ. It is a look back to His gift, His sacrifice, His death. The death of Christ (taking into consideration the subsequent resurrection) is the most pivotal event in human history. His death was the culmination of the great plan of redemption which was conceived in the mind of God before creation.

The Lord's Supper is about death that leads to life. His death leading to our lives. One other thing before we actually have the Lord's Supper.

5. Anticipates the coming of Jesus. (26)

Until He comes. Every time we observe the Lord's Supper we do so in anticipation of His return. When He comes again we can stop doing this. We do so with the knowledge that He has not returned, but knowing that He surely will.

6. Calls for self-examination. (27-29)

This is one of the most important things we learn from this text.

Unworthy manner. The way in which we participate, not the worthiness of the participant.

1. With no thought of its meaning.
2. Wrong Motive - impress others, cover sin.
3. Unconfessed, ongoing sin in your life.

Thorough self-exam each time you come. Look into spiritual mirror and take inventory. Motives, attitudes, relationships, thoughts.

7. Warns of the discipline of the Lord. (30-32)

Paul even warns of the seriousness of the discipline of the Lord regarding the Lord's Supper. Some are sick and others have died. God takes seriously our attitude and perspective when we come to the Lord's table. He sees the heart and responds to what He sees.

Some practical thoughts and reminders:

1) Participation is for believers.

Nowhere in Scripture are unbelievers invited to join in this very sacred and important act of worship. Parents, it's a good time to instruct your children. If you are a born-again believer in Jesus, then we invite you to join with us. If not, we invite you to consider the message of salvation that is declared through this demonstration. We encourage you to become a Christian.

2) Participation is optional.

Though we are instructed and even commanded to do this on a reoccurring basis, no one should feel coerced. The stakes are too high. So, if there is any reason for you to abstain today, we will honor that. Do not feel any compulsion to do so.

3) Participation follows examination.

So, we want to take a moment to ask you to examine your own heart. Confess any sins. Make sure that your heart is clean before the Lord.

Invitation. Music only, no words.

Eat the bread together.

Drink the juice together.

Have a final congregational song.

Closing Prayer

