

Thanksgiving in Biblical Perspective
“We Gather Together”
I Corinthians 11:17–34
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As we come to the Lord’s Supper we want God’s Word by God’s Spirit to prepare our hearts. As we come to the Lord’s Supper we come to partake of Jesus, not because the elements change but we partake of Him by faith. Faith comes by hearing the Word (Romans 10:17) thus God’s Word by God’s Spirit is what brings us to partake of the Table as we come to the cup and the bread. Let’s look at I Corinthians 11. Paul sets up the Lord’s Supper in its proper celebration for the church.

I Corinthians 11:17–34 says [17] *But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because **when you come together** it is not for the better but for the worse. [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. [20] **When you come together**, it is not the Lord’s Supper that you eat. [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.*

[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.*

[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.*

The Lord’s Supper has been designed as a means of grace to help us grow but because they were misusing the Lord’s Supper it had become a liability instead of an asset to their Christian walk. They had become thoughtless about each other in the taking of Communion. Paul was telling them they have problems in this church spiritually, physically and emotionally and one of the reasons why is because of the hand of God’s disciple that was upon them. It is not the judgment of condemnation to the lost but the judgment of discipline from the Lord disciplining them because they were not coming to the Table discerning the body and focused upon Christ. This is why Paul wanted to admonish them so that the Table would become an asset.

There are a couple of thoughts I want to give you as we come to the Table. I have been very excited about the opportunity we have to come to the Lord's Supper together especially since we had not been able to due to the current pandemic until now and I have been anticipating it for many reasons. But for now I want to share some thoughts with you.

Interestingly, in the Bible there are a number of terms used as identifying marks and word pictures of Christ's church. Christ's church is called the bride of Christ. It's called the Army of the Lord. It's called the family of God. There are two words that are used that translate to church in the Bible. One is the word *ekklesia* and it means the called out ones. The other is the word *sunagoge* and it means the called together ones. It's obvious that we can't be the called together ones until we're the called out ones. We have to be called out of the ignorance of darkness. We have to be called out by the grace of God, from the idolatry of self. We have to be called out from the insanity of sin. We are called out of that to Christ whereby we put our trust in Him alone for the forgiveness of our sins, the breaking of the power of sin and for growing us so that we walk away from the practice of sin that we may walk in the grace of God for Christ.

So we are the called out ones as God's family, but we're also called the called together ones. That is why you see the church called family. A number of years ago within the space of a year, I lost my father who was kind of bigger than life in my life and then my mother who was the rock throughout all of our lives. I was up in Charlotte attending and preaching at the General Assembly that year and at that time I had the chance to see some of my friends back at Christ Covenant where I had been serving for 18 years before I came to Briarwood. My mother had come over that Friday night and we had a dinner together with my sisters which was a wonderful time of fellowship. My mom said 'So how am I getting home?' I said 'Well, I brought you over and you taught me whoever I took to the party I had to take home so I'm taking you home.'

So I took her home and it wasn't but a few minutes later that I received a phone call from her and she was met with a catastrophic embolism. Thankfully I was able to get back there before she went to the Lord but she did go to the Lord. The next day I had already committed to doing a wedding for some people there at Christ Covenant so I did the wedding and then drove back to Birmingham. I had the great privilege to be back here on the Lord's Day to worship and be with my church family here.

Briarwood is full of very Godly gracious ladies, daughters of Sarah and mothers of Israel, and one of them came up to me after that Sunday service and said 'Pastor, I admire your sense of duty to drive back here for worship but you know you really didn't have to.' I said 'Ma'am thank you for your kindness and your graciousness but you need to know I wish I could claim the high ground of duty but I got back here because there was no other place I wanted to be.' I lost my mom and I wanted to be with my family, not only my family but my church family. I wanted to feast in worship that Lord's Day and then I'd be able to get back.

I believe we are in some challenging years in our nation and in the winnowing of the evangelical church. I think there are even some challenges that are facing my own denomination but the one thing that gives me such encouragement is that my eyes are fixed on Jesus. And I'm grateful to be a part of His church, His family because that is when you begin to sense family. Whether it's the pandemic, the turmoil of the culture, the challenges, the seemingly intrepid intrusions of Satan into the leadership of even the professing evangelical church, it is in moments of adversity that family begins to manifest itself.

That's the way it was in my family growing up. When we got together we'd have at each other but when the pressure came there was immediate loyalty and dependability. One of the great things about family is the fact that families love to feast together. God knows that His

family needs each other and He has provided a feast for us but it is not in the quantity or even the quality of what we partake of. It is in the substance of what it directs us to and that is the atoning death of Christ and the glory and majesty of His righteousness for us. It's here that His family focuses to the glory of the Father upon the Son He gave to save us from our sins that we may grow together in grace.

The noun for the word *sunagoge* is translated congregation or church but the verb is in the I Corinthians 11 text five times. In this text the noun is turned into a verb and concerning the Lord's Supper it is the phrase 'when you come together' that is in bold in the text at the beginning of this study. It is not accident that we sang together before this study the song that says 'we gather together to ask the Lord's blessing.' I have been asked many times during this pandemic about the Lord's Supper and a virtual Lord's Supper I just don't see it, because it's what we do when we come together. And it's no mistake that we get it five times in this one text, but Paul also tells us to look at how we come together.

Back then they had a thing called the Agape Feast in the early church. We have kind of replaced it with a Communion season so we'll announce Communion the week before and we'll give ways for you to prepare for it through the catechism, preaching and study so that we come in a manner worthy of the Lord, not that we're worthy but we come in a manner worthy so we are prepared to benefit from the Lord's Supper. The text warns us that there is a way we can come together that is not worthy in the Lord.

I have stood in a place where this Agape Feast likely happened at Corinth. So here they would have this love feast and the Apostle Paul was pointing out to them that in this case there was no love. Those who had flaunted what they had in front of those who had not and then they would come to the cup and bread together after their Agape Feast which would divide them rather than them coming together. This Table is calling us to come together.

How do we come together in the best possible way? We have just gone through 70 days of a call to fervent prayer and while it concludes on this day as we come to the Table, you do not have to cease fervent prayer. Our call to fervent prayer while it continues, we're now asking you to move into a season of thanksgiving to the Lord. The Bible brings us to the reality of adversity when it says *[18] give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you* (I Thessalonians 5:18). Yes, we are to do this even in the tests, the trials and the disappointments. We are moving into a season of challenges, I believe that, but I don't want to run from it.

I'm grateful and in a family there are those who lead with courage. I'm grateful for the informal leaders and well as the formal leaders along with elders, deacons and pastoral staff. They not only lead with courage but with compassion. They know how to discern the body right. They know how to wait for one another. They know how to care for one another. We have in our house a trellis that I put up that will immediately clue you in on what is about to happen. Recently the remnants of a hurricane that came through the gulf brought that trellis down and I said to my wife, "I know why it fell. I didn't do a good job nailing it down." When adversity comes we found out if we're built on the foundation and the family comes together.

How do we come together? I'm going to give you three things that I have drawn out from the text. One, use the Table as God's instrument to examine yourself. We so readily examine everybody else. This is the time to examine yourself. Secondly, discern your relationships in the family of God. I know we don't have the same levels of intimacy with everyone in God's family, but are you, with your own unique personality functioning in the family. It's not just drive by for a holiday. It is, you're in the family. These are your brothers

and sisters and I want to be here for them, with them and encourage them. Like any other family it doesn't always go the way we want it to go but we have the desire to be there for each other. We want to apply ourselves to each other redemptively. Thirdly, let's gather together having daily sought to gather others to Christ and into His family, to know the blessings of true family unity.

When I think of the family that I grew up in and the family I have had the privilege to be the daddy and husband in, nobody is the same and isn't that wonderful? Wouldn't you just love if God would keep giving us more and more diversity – economically, socially, ethnically and everything. Then the world looks and says 'now what brings those people together for they aren't birds of a feather, so why do they come together?' That could be a hymn for I just came up with a line right there. It's because those who were not a people have become the people of God and they are family. I Peter 2:10 says *[10] Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.* We love one another and the world will see that we love one another. We care for one another with our unique gifts and abilities.

So come to our thanksgiving meal. Examine yourself and then discern how you can edify your brothers and sisters in the Lord. The family is not all about me. The family is here as the blessing of our Father through His Son and the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit. O God, let me now grieve the Spirit but may we welcome Him in how we love one another. O God, as the days approach would You send that glorious awakening and would You send it to us and in us and through us? So that when we gather together we gather together having sought to gather others to our Savior and our Lord. Now come, taste, and drink, the Lord is good. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You so much for the moments we could be together in Your Word. Thank You for the great and glorious privilege to serve You and Your people. Lord, this church is an army that is on a mission, to declare a message, given the weapons of the Spirit for ministry. Your church is the bride. Your church is the Temple of the Lord. Your church is pictured gloriously and wonderfully because of its many faceted callings and blessings. Your church is family. Father, may we as we meet at this Table, give thanks. May we examine ourselves. May we discern our relationships with each other and Father, may we seek not only coming to the meal but even when we leave the meal to gather others into the gathering of Your family by leading them to Christ and bringing Christ to them, but most of all right now for this family and those who have come to be with us tonight, I pray that we would fix our eyes on Jesus who shed His blood, thus we drink the cup of life, who took our sins in His body, thus we no longer bear them. May we hear and see our Savior fresh, new, to be refreshed and to be renewed. May we see and hear Him by faith, I pray in Jesus' Name, Amen.