

The Lord's Supper in Biblical Perspective
"God's Design on How to Come Together for the Better"
I Corinthians 11:17–34
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It is the Word of God that brings us to the Table of our Lord. This is the Word of God and God's Word is the Truth. 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 grass withers, the flower fades, God's Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

It was the fall of my sixth grade year I realized the last year of my little league baseball was coming up. I had always wanted to make the All Star team but it hadn't happened yet even though this was my sixth year. Some of you are probably wondering how I did six years in little league. Back then little league was for ages 8 to 12 and yes that's five years. I have to confess that I lied about my age and started when I was 7 years old. I know that wasn't right. Because I really wanted to make the All Star team I told my dad I wanted to get ready for what was coming in my junior high year and beyond.

So at Christmas I received a couple of Christmas gifts. One was an unbelievable book that someone stole from me. I loaned it to someone who never gave it back and as far as I'm concerned they stole it. It was titled the Ins and Outs of Baseball by Coach Otto Vogel who coached the Iowa State baseball team and after the first service I met someone who actually

played for him. This book laid out a plan as to how you could get ready for the season, how to do spring training, the kind of drills to do, etc. My dad told me to read it and then make a plan. Then he took me in the backyard because he had already made me something that would help me with my baseball.

Now I'm the type of person who only has three tools in the shed – a hammer, a pair of pliers and a screwdriver. Anything that needs something beyond those tools we hire someone and my dad was even worse than me, but somehow he had made this contraption between two pine trees where he had hung a baseball covered in black duct tape by a chain and gave me a weighted bat. Then he told me "Son, I want you to do at least 500 swings a day with this." I said 'Can I bargain for a 100?' I would hit that ball where it would go round and round and finally stop and I hit it again and again. You need to realize that this was in 1960 so I didn't have all the stuff that is out today that helps kids be a better baseball player. That was the best we could come up with back then.

That was the same year that in Charlotte, North Carolina that it snowed every Wednesday in March and we had accumulated almost two and half feet of snow by the end of March. My dad was already at spring training that year but he wrote me a letter where he asked me three questions. I will tell you what they were shortly but when I told my dad I wanted to get better said to me 'Read this book, make a plan and go out and swing that bat 500 times every single day.' He purchased it, put it together and now it was in my hands. Keep that in your mind as we come to this text.

The book of Corinthians is an interesting book. I hope the Lord will allow me to preach through this book of Corinthians at some point. In the opening chapters of I Corinthians there is not only encouragement that Paul writes to this church in Corinth but I want you to realize that Paul got to know this church very well but they didn't like him very much for they challenged him all the time. He stayed at this church more than any other church except Ephesus. He was at Ephesus three years but he was at Corinth 18 months. Now that he is gone they have written Paul a letter asking him seven questions. So the first couple of chapters have to do with his encouragement to them and then he starts answering their questions.

If you want to know the questions they asked Paul deals with each of them by starting to answer each one with the phrase 'Now concerning... (the things you wrote).' When he answers them you can see the pastoral heart of Paul for he is constantly instructing them and when necessary admonishing them. He also encourages and exhorts them. One of the areas he is addressing is the problem with the Lord's Supper. It was not a blessing but it had become a problem. In fact, because of their misuse and abuse of the Lord's Supper, God's discipline, not His condemning discipline and judgment that falls upon unbelievers, but His loving discipline to the point that there were physical ramifications, where even some had already been taken out of this world and into His presence.

Paul told them that it ought not to be this way and sends an admonishment. He says 'As you profane the Lord's Supper, do you despise the church of God and why are you shaming one another? (I Corinthians 11:22).' Like any good pastor, while he is going to recognize the issues, he is not going to leave them unaddressed. He now instructs and encourages them to reclaim the use of the Lord's Supper and there are some things I don't want you to miss here.

Five times in the text of I Corinthians 11 he used the phrase 'when you come together...'. The Lord's Supper is not a little pick-me-up type of gimmick that we do. No, this is a sacrament of the covenant for those who have been baptized and profess Christ to eat a covenant meal of renewal with each other and the Lord. When does it occur? It occurs when you come together.

This is so important that if you ever get to a place where you are shut in our elders have authorized us to bring the Lord's Supper to you and we don't bring it privately. We'll bring people with us and have a little worship service because it's a 'come together meal.' So even if we have to have a smaller service in your house and providentially you're in that situation then that's what we do. We honor it. We do it ten times a year here at Briarwood, four Sunday mornings, four Sunday nights, Maundy Thursday, Christmas Eve and we will announce when we will do this so that you can prepare and in that service we are going to come to the Lord's Supper.

Another thing is that the Lord's Supper is designed by the Father for you to come together for the better, to get better but we don't get better to be saved. We are fully trusting in what Christ did for us. And we don't get better to stay saved for we trust in Christ who seals us by His Spirit and His blood, but we do want to get better for our Savior. We want to be more like Him. We want to have less to do with sin and more to do with Him. We want to live unto Him who alone is worthy. We want to honor Him with our lives and we don't start off as a blank tablet. We start off as sinners saved by grace. We have stinkin' thinkin' and stinkin' livin' and we have to put off the old man and put on the new man. God says 'I have provided things for you and you will find them when you come together.'

I know that you think that preachers are always trying to get you to embrace the Lord's Day and faithful attendance at worship because we want a job. No, that is not true. I do want to do my job but that's not it. Hebrews 10:24–25 says [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.* God has designed some gifts for you – the Lord's Day. Mark 2:27–28 says [27] *And he said to them, "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. [28] So the Son of Man is lord even of the Sabbath."* It's a gift, are you intentionally using it?

One of the reasons it's a gift is because He has also given preaching and Jesus Himself speaks through His Word to the hearts of His people. In Christ-centered preaching that's what God uses to grow you in your faith. There is gathered corporate prayer – you have not because you ask not. There is fellowship for when you come together you encourage one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, stimulating one another, and speaking the truth in love to one another. He inhabits the praise of His people.

One of those things He has designed for you in the coming together on the Lord's Day is the Lord's Supper. When Paul tells them they are misusing and abusing the Lord's Supper he is saying it's not neutral for it's actually ending up for the worse, when the Father originally designed it for the better. Again, the Father has designed the Table for us to come together for the better, not for the worse but they were coming together for the worse. So Paul calls them pastorally to two things.

He wants them to reclaim the profitability of the Lord's Supper when you assemble for the preaching, the Word, prayer and fellowship so Paul tells us two things. The first thing is that when you come together you are to come with the right perspective and secondly with the right preparation. Then he identifies the perspective. Right in front of you are two elements that come from the Old Covenant meal of the Passover – the fruit of the vine (wine) and the unleavened bread.

In the Passover the wine would have been diluted to three cups of water to one cup of wine. There would have been diluted wine, unleavened bread and a lamb. In the New Covenant meal, there is no lamb because we are remembering the Lamb but we still have those two

elements. They are ordinary elements but they are set aside for an extraordinary purpose. This is My body and this is My blood. Get the right perspective.

Historically in the professing church there have been three ways this has been interpreted. One way that the Reformers inherited and addressed in the 16th century was the view that when Jesus said that about His body and blood it came to be known as transubstantiation where the substances actually translated into His actual body and blood – the physical presence of the Lord and the re-sacrifice of the Lord at the Table.

The Reformers rejected that and rightly so. They rejected that view for three reasons. One it was utterly irrational and illogical. When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper and said 'this is My body and My blood' where was He? He was in the Upper Room standing there so His body and blood were right there in His Incarnate presence. The second reason we don't believe it changes physical presence is because the body of Jesus now is at the right hand of the Father until He comes again. The third reason why is because the sacrifice of Christ was once and for all. He is not to be sacrificed again and again and again.

The key is found in another perspective that was established when He said 'do this in remembrance of Me.' So it has come to be said that the elements are the memorial presence of Christ and they are on to something but they are not on to all of it.

The third perspective is that there is the real, spiritual presence of the Lord that you are partaking of Him by faith. You are feasting upon the benefits of the body and blood of Christ – His body that bore your sins and His blood whereby you are forgiven of your sins. So while the physical presence of the Lord is not there the real, spiritual presence of the Lord is there through the benefits of the covenant, secured when He bore your sins in His body and shed His life blood to pay for all of our sins as He bore the hell that was due to us. So when you come 'take eat for this is My body and drink for this is My blood, do this in remembrance of Me.' It is My body and My blood for you.

In order to help with the right perspective it is the reason we always do the preaching of the Word because faith comes by hearing (Romans 10:17) so the preaching of the Word is preparing our hearts to spiritually feast upon Jesus at His Table as we come to partake of Him. This leads to the right preparation.

We are to come in a manner worthy the text says. That doesn't mean any of us are worthy of what Jesus has done but it does mean in light of Jesus' worthiness, when we come we don't come haphazardly or in a wrong way. We come in a right way. Paul lays out for us the elements in coming in a right way, not only theologically and properly instructed as the purpose and substance of the Lord's Supper, with the right perspective but also with the right preparation.

Where does it start? Just like in the Old Covenant they cleaned out the leaven in the bread and as we come to this Table. When we come to this Table we clean out the leaven of sin as Paul tells us to examine ourselves. Prepare yourself personally. Then prepare your family. Then prepare with the family of God. Wait for one another. Love one another. If you have aught against one another the Table calls us to go handle that. Ask forgiveness and give forgiveness. We come to this Table as a family meal.

The Passover was a family meal. The first Lord's Supper was Jesus and His Disciples. What are the Disciples? They are the embryonic church. What is the New Covenant family? We are the family of God. I don't care what color, ethnicity, age, gender, demographic or economic background for it doesn't matter. We who are not a people become the people of God and we are in the family as brothers and sisters in the Lord. So we come together not only

looking at ourselves personally but looking to one another and our families as we prepare them to properly partake of the Table.

Fathers are to prepare their children and if their children have not yet publically confessed Christ and been received into the church then they use the Table to tell them of their need to profess Christ. Because the Table can't save you but Jesus will and the Table is telling them 'My son, My daughter, you need a Savior.' The Table is also telling them of the benefits that belong to those who belong to the people of God.

Some people, because the Lord's Supper is so precious and sacred, think that we need to do come to the Table every Sunday but that has not been the history of the Reformed church. The history of the Reformed church says there are two things we want to avoid. We never want to do the Lord's Supper superficially or superstitiously. Therefore whenever you do the Lord's Supper you will prepare for it. That's why the Reformed church has always said that they will have communion seasons.

This is why we always announce the week before the Lord's Supper. We also give you passages of Scripture so that you can come prepared personally, as a family and as a people of God to the Lord's Supper. It is also why we use the whole service, what we sing, what we confess, what is preached etc. to even help us prepare to come to the Lord's Supper. We have the Lord's Supper ten times a year, because we believe that this is important.

It's a sacred Table and we need to have the right perspective and the right preparation when we come to it, because your Father designed it for you to grow, not for grace, but in the means of grace – preaching, prayer, fellowship, worship, the sacraments. It is a means of grace when it is received by faith through the Word of God, empowered by the Spirit of God because like preaching, prayer and fellowship its purpose is to focus you upon Christ and the cross.

Jesus couldn't have gotten to the cross if He hadn't been born of a virgin for an atoning death. The Table assumes a virgin birth. When you partake of it the Scripture says that you proclaim the Lord's death, His atoning death, until He comes. He can't come if He is still in the grave. So this Table presupposes the virgin birth, the resurrection and it declares this Jesus is ascended and is coming again. But when we partake of this Table we are recalibrated back to the cross, because the more serious you are about Jesus the more apt we are to get our confidence what we are doing instead of what Jesus did for us on that cross. You are getting renewed, refreshed, and recalibrated back to the cross.

As the hymn *Alas and Did My Savior Bleed* says;
*At the cross, at the cross where
I first saw the light,
And the burden of my heart rolled away,
It was there by faith I received my sight,
And now I am happy all the day!*

He is bringing you back to ground zero of the Christian life – the cross, where the One who was born of a virgin was born to die for our sins. The One who died, was buried and is risen and He is coming again. We tell the world 'Jesus at the cross saves' and now at the Table He is telling us personally and as a family that He is our Hope. And the cross is a sure hope for all who put their trust in Him. The Father designed this Table for you!

In the spring of 1960, as I said at the beginning of this study, I received a letter from my dad because he was already away at Spring Training. In the letter he asked me three questions. The first was 'Son, have you read the book I gave you, The Ins and Outs of Baseball?' The second question was 'Son, what's your plan to get ready for this season and are you doing it?'

The third question was ‘Are you in that backyard swinging that bat, hitting that ball, watching it going around and around, and stopping it and doing it again? Are you using what I designed and put up for you?’

I’m not going to tell you how I answered all of that but the Father is telling you and me today that He has designed this Table for your better, for you to grow. Have you read it? Do you have the right perspective? Have you made the plan by My grace and for My glory and are you taking your swing? Examine yourself and come to the Table for the better. This Table tells you that God loves you. This Table tells you that His Son loves you and gave Himself on the cross for you. This is My body and My blood that were given freely for you. Let’s pray.

Prayer:

In these few moments ask the Lord to speak to your heart. Holy Spirit thank You for these moments that we could be together. Would You guide us and direct us to the Table? Thank You for Jesus, the body of Christ that bore our sins, the blood of Christ that paid for our sins and thank You that You have paid it all Jesus! Now, Jesus come to us for we are sinners saved by grace and we have come to Your Table for the better. Do Your work of grace in us, for Your glory I pray, Amen.