

One of the most significant events in the local church is the Lord's Supper. Jesus, the night before His crucifixion, instituted this "ordinance" as a continual reminder of His person and work. "Do this in remembrance of Me."

We call it "Communion" for it is a celebration of our *union* with God and each other based on the atoning work of our Savior. The early church observed the Lord's Table frequently, as seen in the book of Acts.

Acts 2:42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Acts 20:7 On the first day of the week we came together to break bread.

But Satan loves to take a good thing and turn it into something very ugly, in so doing bringing dishonor to the Lord. That's what happened in Corinth.

Beginning in 1 Corinthians 11:17 Paul moves to a new, yet related subject affecting the Corinthian church. The general topic remains the same—in chapters 11-14 he's talking about how to deal with *disorder* in the church worship services. The specific issue addressed in verses 17-34 concerns the *Lord's Supper*.

Review: From last time...

I. Paul exposed problems in observance of the Lord's Supper (17-22).

A. There were divisions (17-19).

Here are two implications...

1. *Differences are to be expected.*

It's inevitable that differences will arise in churches. People are different. They are at different levels of maturity. They have different interests and backgrounds, etc. That's what Paul has been explaining in chapters 8-10.

So Paul says differences are to be expected. However...

2. *Divisions are not.*

Where do divisions begin? With a heart attitude, namely selfishness...

B. There was selfishness (20-22).

When the Corinthians assembled for worship they would eat the Lord's Supper as part of their worship, just as the Lord commanded. But Paul makes a shocking statement in v 20, "When you come together it is *not* the Lord's Supper you eat."

To sum up the problem at hand...

1. *In the Lord's Supper, we are supposed to remember the Lord.*

2. *The Corinthians were thinking of themselves.*

New Material: This week...

II. Paul reviewed the purpose of the Lord's Supper (23-26).

Read verses 23-26.

Q: According to v 23, where did the Corinthians learn about observing Communion?

Paul taught them. Now he takes them back to the basics and reminds them of the *purpose* of the Lord's Supper. If we forget the purpose any action can easily turn into mere ritual, empty worship, or even worse—we can think we are pleasing God by our

“religious activity” when in fact we are displeasing Him and bring judgment upon ourselves. Such was the case for the Corinthians.

In terms of its purpose, two things occur when we observe the Lord’s Supper...

A. We remember our selfless Savior (22-25).

If you stop and think about it that’s what the elements remind us about Jesus, His sacrifice, yes, but also the heart attitude behind the sacrifice, *His selflessness*. How else can you explain why the Lord of the universe would leave His throne in heaven, come to earth, and die in humiliation as a substitute for sinners? What would motivate the Lord to do this? It was the very thing the Corinthians were lacking. *Selflessness*.

Paul emphasizes two things about the Savior in verses 22-25...

1. *He didn’t think of Himself*. Rather...
2. *He gave Himself for us*.

Paul relates what happened in the final meal Jesus had with His disciples. First, He took bread, gave thanks, broke the bread, and said something to His followers. “This is my body (24).” He also said, “It is *for you*.”

Q: What did He say His followers were to do as they ate the bread? V 24

Then after supper, in the same way, he took the cup. It was a common cup.

Q: What announcement did He make about the significance of this cup? V 25

Q: According to v 26, when we eat and drink the elements, what are we doing?

B. We proclaim His death (26).

In a very real sense we preach a sermon every time we observe the Lord’s Table. We have in mind two aspects of Christ’s work. What two aspects? His death and His coming. We remember the first, while we anticipate the latter.

Remember something. Paul is not telling the Corinthians anything new here. He had already “passed it on to you.”

Discuss: Why is Paul reminding the Corinthians of something so basic as this?

An essential part of successful Christian living is being *reminded* of truth we’ve already learned.

Discuss: Why do we need the ministry of *reminding*?

III. Paul discussed the practice of the Lord’s Supper (27-34).

Paul begins v 27 with the term “therefore.” What does that word indicate when we see it in the Bible? We’re about to see implications of truth just presented. Paul gives two types of implications...

A. Here are some warnings to consider (27-32).

Four warnings...

1. *Don’t participate in an unworthy manner (27).*

Q: What does he mean by eating and drinking in an “unworthy” manner?

Keep in mind the Corinthian context and problem at hand (v 21)

Q: What happens if we participate in such an unworthy manner?

2. *Examine yourself before you participate (28).*

Discuss: What does it mean to “examine” oneself?

3. *If we fail to examine ourselves, we will bring judgment on ourselves (29-30).*

Q: What does Paul mean when he refers to the Lord's "body" in v 29?

Q: What had already occurred in the Corinthian church according to v 30?

4. *If we judged ourselves, the Lord would not have to judge us (31-32).*

Q: Why does God judge (i.e. discipline) His people?

To sum it up, this is serious business. If a Christian refuses to live in obedience to God's Word, there can be severe consequences, even to point of losing one's life.

Discuss: What does this passage teach us about the Lord?

B. Here are some steps of preparation (33-34).

1. *Wait for one another (33).*

Q: What does he mean by "wait" [KJV, 'tarry'] here?

2. *If you are hungry, eat before you come to church (34).*

This is a very practical bit of counsel. Why does Paul say this?

Key: I'm not sure most of us understand and appreciate the significance of the local church in God's eyes. We tend to take a very individualistic view of the Christian life. "As long as I'm okay with God, I'm okay with God!" we seem to think. Listen. If I'm not okay with you (my brothers and sisters), I'm not okay with God—no matter how often I have my devotions, etc.

On the other hand, it's a beautiful thing when we begin to appreciate the significance of the local church in God's plan.

Discuss: What are practical affects this understanding will have on us?