

Iglesia de Carne

Studies in First Corinthians

Text

First Corinthians 11:17-34

Topic

For behaving like gluttons at the potluck prior to the Lord's Supper, some of the believers in Corinth were being severely disciplined by God

Title

"Gluttons for Punishment"

Pippin was distraught to learn that Aragorn was not going to stop on their journey to Weathertop until nightfall.

"What about breakfast?" the Hobbit asked. When Aragorn answered that they had already eaten breakfast, Pippin said, "We've had one, yes. What about second breakfast?"

He went on to list Elevenses, Lunch, Afternoon Tea, Dinner, and Supper. He failed to mention Brunch, which is different than Elevenses. And some people refer to Linner - a late Lunch that's almost Dinner.

There are Banquets and Barbecues and Buffets and Blue Plate Specials. There are Kid's Meals and Meals on Wheels; Picnics and Pot Lucks.

The believers in Corinth came together every Sunday evening for two meals: A *potluck* that preceded the *Lord's Supper*. It may have started well, but it had deteriorated:



1 Co 11:21 For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of *others*; and one is hungry and another is drunk.

The potluck had gotten out of control. Correction was in order, and as Paul gave it, the Holy Spirit seized the opportunity to give the church additional insights into the meal that mattered, the Lord's Supper.

I'll organize my comments around two points: **#1 When You Come Together As The Lord's Temple, Wait For One Another**, and **#2 When You Come Together To The Lord's Table, Be A Witness To Others**.

#1 - When You Come Together As The Lord's Temple, Wait For One Another (v17-22 & 33-34)

Little Country Church by Love Song was one of the great worship anthems of the Jesus Movement. It's end lyrics:

*Long hair, short hair, some coats and ties
People finally comin' around
Lookin' past the hair and straight into the eyes
People finally comin' around
And it's very plain to see
It's not the way it used to be*

It praises the Lord for bringing believers together as one in Christ; and as equals. Racial distinctions, class distinctions, age distinctions, economic distinctions, are all set aside because we are members of His body.

Men and women retain their gender, and respective roles, as established at creation; but we, too, are equals. Someone said, "The ground below the Cross is level."

The behavior of the believers in Corinth prior to, and at, the Lord's Supper was undermining their oneness and equality.

1Co 11:17 Now in giving these instructions I do not praise *you*, since you come together not for the better but for the worse.



Their "coming together" is repeated about five times in this entire section. It is a technical term for the meetings of the church.

Each week, on Sunday evening, they came together to eat a common meal. Some refer to it as the Agape Feast, or the Love Feast. We would call it a potluck, as each family or member who had the means, brought food for the meal. But instead of being "together," some were separating from others by partaking of their own food while ignoring the needs of others - thereby fostering a division based on socio-economic status.

Their behavior was not for "better," but for "worse."

1Co 11:18 For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it.

There is no mandate in the Bible to have a potluck before celebrating the Lord's Supper. It was their own idea. It was a good one, in that the wealthy could benefit the poor, and that both believing and nonbelieving onlookers and attendees could see a physical example of the spiritual oneness Christians have.

Instead... "there [were] divisions," which we will see explained in verse twenty-one.

Paul said, "and in part I believe it." He obviously believed it, because he was addressing it. Have you ever used the expression, "I just can't believe it," when, in fact, you know something is true?

1Co 11:19 For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you.

The word translated "factions" might be *heresies* in your Bible. It's accurate, but carries a different connotation for us. "Factions" is just another way of saying "divisions."

Gordon Fee says of this verse, "This sentence is one of the true puzzles in the letter. How can he who earlier in the letter argued so strongly against divisions now confirm a kind of divine necessity to divisions?"



There is nothing in Paul's words that would indicate their factions were a good thing. It's a "must" given that we are all flawed, in our bodies of flesh, prone to yielding to our carnal impulses rather than to God the Holy Spirit.

Factions happen; and, when they do, "those who are approved may be recognized among you." Their behavior at these potlucks exposed prejudice in the hearts of those separating themselves. It unexpectedly outed them. Those who understood our oneness and equality in Jesus were thereby revealed, too. They were thus "approved."

1Co 11:20 Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper.

Because they were dividing, their partaking of the bread and cup could in no way be the Lord's Supper. Its very nature is to show unity.

1Co 11:21 For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of *others*; and one is hungry and another is drunk.

The Corinthians were mostly Gentiles who had been saved from pagan religions. In those religions, the worship of the deity was often accompanied by a feast in which meat sacrificed to an idol would be eaten, and in which drunkenness would ensue. They were carrying this over into the potluck.

"Takes his own supper" indicates they ate the food they brought, not sharing it, leaving others "hungry."

1Co 11:22 What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise *you*.

I should mention that some commentators argue that Paul was telling them to quit gathering before the service for a meal.

That wouldn't solve the underlying problem. The problem wasn't gluttony, or drunkenness.



Those were symptoms that there was a root problem - prejudice causing divisions.

More likely, he was pointing out that those who brought sumptuous baskets of food, only to consume it themselves, were "shaming" the poor.

The church of God isn't the building; it's the saints. The behavior of the wealthier members was showing spite on the poor members. How do you think that's going to play at the Judgement Seat of Jesus?

"What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you."

It sounds like they were proud of their love feasts. Maybe they thought it was cutting edge, or trending, to add something to their liturgy.

1Co 11:33 Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.

1Co 11:34 But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come.

"Hungry" in this context means, "If you're going to scarf the food." In that case, eating at home prior to the potluck might be a practical suggestion.

The "judgment" will be described as we go back and comment on the remaining verses.

I used to wish we knew what was "the rest" that Paul would "set in order." It would limit our freedom if we knew exactly how they celebrated the Lord's Supper in Corinth. We'd feel obligated to do it just like Paul.

Verse thirty-three is fundamental not just to a potluck. It has broad application. Substitute other things in place of "eat." "When you come together to (fill in the blank), wait for one another."

By "wait" I mean to prefer; to put others ahead of yourself; to humble yourself.

If you practice waiting for one another, you can't really go wrong.



#2 When You Come Together To The Lord's Table, Be A Witness To Others (v23-32)

Christians are trending towards rediscovering the Lord's Supper. The claim is that we are not doing it right, and haven't been for centuries. They say we need to get back to the practices of earlier believers.

Hank Hannegraaff, who inherited the title, "The Bible Answer Man," has recently joined the Eastern Orthodox Church.

Regarding the Lord's Supper, he says it is not a "mere memorial," but that the 'real presence' of Jesus in the elements is a "mystery" that cannot, and need not, be explained. He teaches that this is the belief of the early church.

This idea that somehow the 'real presence' of Jesus is in the celebration of the Lord's Supper does not draw me closer to Jesus. It distances me, because I only have this 'real presence,' this mystery, when I'm at His Table. Throw-in the practice that only a priest can serve me the elements, and I'm even further from intimacy.

If that isn't very theological, it is practical. Growing-up Roman Catholic, I thought I encountered Jesus once a week, in the wafer. Once it dissolved, I had a week to sin before my next confession. I have no desire to discover ancient practices like that; only biblical ones.

1Co 11:23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the *same* night in which He was betrayed took bread;

Sometime after he was saved on the road to Damascus, Paul spent time alone with Jesus. It is believed that he retired into Arabia for a time. He may have received instruction about the Lord's Supper during that time.

Paul was the one who "delivered" the tradition to the Corinthians. He had founded the church, and stayed there for some eighteen months before moving on.



He said it was the same night Jesus was "betrayed." It reads, "while He was being betrayed." Paul was setting the scene. Judas left, and with only believers, the curtain went up on the New Covenant.

1Co 11:24 and when He had given thanks, He broke *it* and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

Since Eden, God had required a sacrificial lamb to temporarily atone for sin. All those lambs anticipated the final Lamb of God Who would once-for-all take away the sin of the world. Jesus' physical body was about to become the final sacrifice for sin.

1Co 11:25 In the same manner *He* also *took* the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me."

By "blood" Jesus meant His life. Again, there was nothing mystical about His blood, and the fruit of the vine we drink does not become His blood.

The Old Covenant required the constant blood of animals offered by men. The New Covenant has been ratified once and for all by the death of Jesus Christ. Think of it as a new contract. A new contract nullifies the previous one. Some things might be carried over, but if not, they no longer apply.

The Lord's Supper is a "remembrance," not a re-enactment, of what Jesus did on the Cross.

1Co 11:26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.

It's more obvious that "death" is prominent in the original word order of the Greek: "The death of the Lord you proclaim until He comes" is the more literal translation.

Jesus was born to die. His mission was to go to the Cross. It wasn't an afterthought, or a mistake. It was necessary in order for mankind to be reconciled to God.



On the Cross, as the Lamb of God taking away the sins of the world, Jesus Himself said, "It is finished!"

This is the second time Paul uses the words, "As often." I believe that they give us freedom in the frequency and in the manner in which we celebrate the Lord's Supper. If you're looking for precedents:

- The Passover Meal that the Lord's Supper followed was an annual celebration.
- You can show from the Book of Acts that some believers celebrated daily in their homes.
- In Corinth, they for sure celebrated weekly.

We can share the bread and cup everyday... Or weekly... Or monthly... We can share the bread and cup at a gathering of saints... Or in our homes.

To those who are pursuing the rediscovery of the mystery of the Lord's Supper, what I'm saying may sound irreverent. It isn't.

If they find some old communion liturgy, and start wearing robes, that doesn't make it reverent. It makes it more mystical than mystery. There is already a genuine mystery at the Lord's Supper. It is the church as His body on the earth. It is you and I proclaiming His death and living for Him "till He comes."

"Till He comes." What coming? For the church, in the resurrection and rapture, prior to the Great Tribulation and His Second Coming to establish the Kingdom. The Lord's Supper, at least in part, is a public proclamation of the Lord's death and of His two returns.

We may use it as a time of introspection and prayer; nothing wrong with that. But it is described here as a public proclamation; as a witness.

This word, "proclaim," can mean that the Supper itself proclaims things, in its symbolism. It is, in fact, meant to communicate without words the death and the returns of Jesus; and therefore how we ought to live in-between.

Let's say a nonbeliever having no previous church experience came to church for the first time ever. At that service, they were exposed to Jesus' simple explanation of the elements, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you;



do this in remembrance of Me,” and, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

Wouldn't the nonbeliever understand the ceremony as proclaiming the Lord's once-and-for-all physical death on the Cross as sealing the New Covenant?

An astute observer might even grasp that in taking the elements, you were also identifying with Jesus in His death. You were, in fact, dying with Him.

But in dying with Him, you remain alive, to serve Him, until His return for you. The nonbeliever might see in symbol what Paul states so clearly in Galatians 2:20, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

1Co 11:27 Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks *this* cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

1Co 11:28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

1Co 11:29 For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

The "unworthy manner" was, in context, being gluttonous and drunk. Pretty easy to "examine" themselves. "Guilty of the body and blood of the Lord" can be paraphrased, "Is like part of the crowd that jeered and spit on him at his death" (MSG). Sometimes we need to see how serious our misbehavior really is.

"Not discerning the Lord's body" is referring to His body on the earth - the church. Those misbehaving were despising the unity of the body by creating divisions.

1Co 11:30 For this reason many *are* weak and sick among you, and many sleep.

1Co 11:31 For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.

"Sleep" is how Paul liked to describe the death of a believer. To be absent from your body is to be immediately, consciously present with Jesus. You will one



day be resurrected, so it's like your body is asleep, as it were, awaiting His coming.

As a temporal (not eternal) discipline from their loving Heavenly Father, some of those misbehaving were falling ill, and even dying. They were **not** judging themselves so God stepped in with Fatherly discipline.

1Co 11:32 But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.

In case you were wondering if those misbehaving were going to Hell, they weren't. Paul was reminding us that we are no longer among those "condemned with the world" for sin. Our sins are forgiven and if we continue in them, we are disciplined - like those in Corinth who were already "weak," "sick," and "sleep[ing]."

A common meme on the internet goes something like this: "This may come as a shock to you, but let me let you in on a little secret: Everything isn't about you!"

Paul's emphasis throughout his teaching on the Lord's Supper has been corporate, not individual. He has been concerned with our attitude toward others.

- He described it as an activity that proclaims we are the corporate body of Jesus.
- He spoke of the elements as proclaiming the Lord's death to onlookers, as a public testimony, not as a private devotion.

The problem that the believers in Corinth were experiencing at the Lord's Supper was due to them thinking too much about themselves, and not enough - or at all - about others.

We might summarize what we're getting at by saying, "The Lord's Supper isn't about you."

Wait for one another at the Lord's Supper, but always as well, and it will be a witness.



The Lord's Supper can be meaningful without being mystical. We don't need to re-enact Jesus' body and blood. In fact, it kind of flies in the face of His declaration from the Cross, "It is finished."

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"Gluttons for Punishment"

