

“Who Should Take Communion”

1 Corinthians 11:23-34

1. The Problems with the Lord’s Supper

“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.” 1 Corinthians 11:18

Divisions were a big problem at Corinth –

In chapter 3 Paul rebukes them for being divided over personalities of their favorite preachers.

Here they were divided over class/status and had cliques of rich people who were selfish toward the poor people.

Divisions in the church are favorite weapons of Satan –

church people today divide over:

Personalities

Music

Service times

Service lengths

Service forms or rituals

Food

Politics

Clothes

Ordinances – baptism & communion

2. The Purpose of the Lord’s Supper

For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; 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." In the same way He took the cup also, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. (11:23-26)

Jesus was celebrating the Passover meal with the disciples; it began with the host's pronouncing a blessing over the first cup of red wine and passing it to the others present.

Four cups of wine were passed around during the meal. After the first cup was drunk bitter herbs dipped in a fruit sauce were eaten and a message was given on the meaning of Passover. Then the first part of a hymn, the Hallel (“Ha – lail”) (which means "praise" and is related to hallelujah, "praise ye the Lord"), was sung.

The Hallel is comprised of Psalms 113-118, and the first part sung was usually 113 or 113 and 114. After the second cup was passed, the host would break and pass around the unleavened bread. Then the meal proper, which consisted of the roasted sacrificial lamb, was eaten. The third cup, after prayer, was then passed and the rest of the Hallel was sung. The fourth cup, which celebrated the coming kingdom, was drunk immediately before leaving.

It was the third cup that Jesus blessed and that became the cup of Communion.

"And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, 'This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood'" (Luke 22:20).

After Jesus gave some brief words of warning, rebuke, and instruction (vv. 21-38), the meal was concluded with the singing of a hymn (Matt. 26:30).

When Jesus had given thanks, He broke it (cf. John 6:11). In the Greek “had given thanks” is a participle of eucharisteō, from which we get Eucharist, the name by which some Christians refer to the Lord's Supper.

The bread that had represented the Exodus now came to represent the body of Jesus Christ, the Messiah.

To the Jewish mind the body represented the whole person, not just his physical body. Jesus' body represents the great mystery of His whole incarnate life, His whole teaching, ministry, and work—all He was and all He did.

The cup that had represented the lamb's blood smeared on the doorposts and lintels now came to represent the blood of the Lamb of God, shed for the salvation of the world.

So Jesus took the cup and said it is the new covenant in My blood. It is important to realize that this was not new in the sense that it was a covenant of grace replacing one of works. It is new in that it is the saving covenant to which all the Old Testament shadows pointed.

The new deliverance is from sin to salvation, from death to life, from Satan's realm to God's heaven.

Passover was transformed into the Lord's Supper. We now eat the bread and drink the cup not to remember the Red Sea and the Exodus but to remember the cross and the Savior.

“Do this in remembrance of Me” is a command from the lips of our Lord Himself. Sharing in the Lord's Supper is therefore not an option for believers. We must have Communion on a regular basis if we are to be faithful to the Lord who bought us through the act we are called to remember. Not partaking of the Lord's Supper is disobedience and a sin.

For the Hebrew “to remember” meant much more than simply to bring something to mind, merely to recall that it happened. To truly remember is to go back in one's mind and recapture as much of the reality and significance of an event or experience as one possibly can. To remember Jesus Christ and His

sacrifice on the cross is to relive with Him His life, agony, suffering, and death as much as is humanly possible. When we partake of the Lord's Supper we do not offer a sacrifice again; we remember His once-for-all sacrifice for us and rededicate ourselves to His obedient service.

“For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.”

As often as we are willing to remember and to proclaim the death of Christ, we will celebrate Communion. No frequency is given, but it is a permanent feast.

It is more than a remembrance for our own sakes; it is also a proclamation for the world's sake. It is a testimony to the world that we are not ashamed of our Lord or of His blood, that we belong to Him and are obedient to Him.

Communion is also a reminder of the Lord's coming again, for He tells us to proclaim His death by this means until He comes. It helps keep us looking forward to the day when we will be with Him. It is a celebration of His present life and of His future return in glory.

There is much involved in that remembrance. When a believer comes to the Lord's table, he remembers Christ's work on the cross (11:25), he partakes of Christ's spiritual presence in the fellowship, not the elements themselves (10:16), he communes with the saints (10:17), he worships in holiness (10:20-22), he proclaims salvation in Christ (11:24-25), and he anticipates the return of the Lord (11:26) and the coming Kingdom (Matt. 26:29).

3. The Preparation for the Lord's Supper

27 So a person who eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in a way that is not worthy of it will be guilty of sinning against the body and the blood of the Lord.

28 Look into your own hearts before you eat the bread and drink the cup,

29 because all who eat the bread and drink the cup without recognizing the body eat and drink judgment against themselves.

30 That is why many in your group are sick and weak, and many have died.

31 But if we judged ourselves in the right way, God would not judge us.

32 But when the Lord judges us, he punishes us so that we will not be destroyed along with the world.

33 So my brothers and sisters, when you come together to eat, wait for each other.

34 Anyone who is too hungry should eat at home so that in meeting together you will not bring God's judgment on yourselves.

1 Corinthians 11:27-34

Because of all that is involved in the ordinance, whoever participates in the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

One can do this in many ways. It is common for people to participate in it ritualistically, without participating with their minds and hearts. They can go through the motions without going through any emotions, and treat it lightly rather than seriously.

They can believe it imparts grace or merit, that the ceremony itself, rather than the sacrifice it represents, can save or keep one saved. Many come with a spirit of bitterness or hatred toward another believer, or come with a sin of which they will not repent. If a believer comes with anything less than the loftiest thoughts of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and anything less than total love for his brothers and sisters in Christ, he comes unworthily.

To come unworthily to the Lord's table is to become guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. To trample our country's flag is not to dishonor a piece of cloth but to dishonor the country it represents.

To come unworthily to Communion does not simply dishonor the ceremony; it dishonors the One in whose honor it is celebrated. We become guilty of dishonoring His body and blood, which represent His total gracious life and work for us, His suffering and death on our behalf. We become guilty of mocking and treating with indifference the very person of Jesus Christ (cf. Acts 7:52; Heb. 6:6; 10:29).

Every time he comes to the Lord's Supper, therefore, a person should examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

Before we partake we are to give ourselves a thorough self-examination, looking honestly at our hearts for anything that should not be there and sifting out all evil. Our motives, our attitudes toward the Lord and His Word, toward His people, and toward the Communion service itself should all come under private scrutiny before the Lord. The table thus becomes a special place for the purifying of the church. That is a vital use of Communion, and Paul's warning reinforces that ideal.

A person who partakes without coming in the right spirit eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly.

Judgment (*krima*) here has the idea of chastisement. Because "there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1), the *kjv* rendering of damnation is especially unfortunate. The great difference in Paul's use here of *krima* (judgment) and *katakrima* (condemned) is seen in verse 32, where it is clear that *krima* refers to discipline of the saved and *katakrima* refers to condemnation of the lost.

That chastening comes if he does not judge the body rightly, that is, the blood and body used in Communion. To avoid God's judgment, one must properly discern and respond to the holiness of the occasion.

The types of chastening the Lord may use are illustrated in verse 30. For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep.

God does not eternally condemn those who abuse the Lord's table, but His punishment may be severe illness. Sleep is here like several other places in the N.T., used metaphorically to speak of the death of believers (as of Lazarus, John 11:11; and Stephen, Acts 7:60). God actually put to death a number (*hikanos*, lit., "sufficient") of believers in Corinth because they continually despised and corrupted the Supper of His Son, just as He had put to death Ananias and Sapphira for lying to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1-11). As in the Old Testament, such divine executions were to serve as examples of what all sinners deserve, and might receive (cf. Luke 13:1-5).

There is a remedy for unworthiness. If we judged ourselves rightly, we should not be judged.

This involves discerning what we are and what we ought to be.

If we confess our sins, our wrong attitudes and motives, God "is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

If we come unworthily and are judged by God, it is not for condemnation. It is for the very opposite. But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord in order that we may not be condemned along with the world. God sends individual chastening to push offenders back toward righteous behavior, and sends death to some in the church to encourage those who remain to choose holiness rather than sin. Even if the Lord were to strike us dead for profaning His table, it would be to discipline us, to keep us from being condemned. The thought is powerful. We are kept from condemnation not only by decree, but also by divine intervention. God chastens us to keep us from falling from salvation, and will even take our life, if need be, before that could happen.

Paul closes by admonishing the Corinthians to get their lives and their attitudes straightened out, to completely discard their prejudices, their selfishness, and their indifference to God's holy ordinance.

The fact that he says "when you come together to eat" assumes that he supported the idea of their fellowship meal, but they should wait for one another before they partake of it. If any were only attending in order to satisfy their physical hunger they should eat at home. Otherwise they pervert the love feast. When they come to the love feast, and especially to the Lord's table, they should come to satisfy their spiritual hunger.