

# "The Lord's Supper"

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

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Four Lakes Church of Christ



## Introduction:

This morning, I would like for us to continue in our series on the acts of worship by looking together at the Lord's Supper. Several weeks ago, we looked at the prayers that we offer together as a congregation (we looked at King Solomon's prayer in the temple). We then studied the singing that we do together as a congregation (we sing to one another, our heart is the instrument, and we sing to God). And then last Sunday we looked together at the preaching of the gospel. The preacher is to preach the word of God with patience and regardless of any obstacles.

But this morning we come to the Lord's Supper. From history, we know that the early Christians partook of the Lord's Supper on the first day of every week. Eusebius was a church historian born somewhere around 270 AD. As Eusebius wrote about the church, he said this, **"Christians assembled on the first day of the week, called by them the Lord's Day, for the purpose of religious worship, to read the Scriptures, preach, and to celebrate the Lord's Supper."** The Lord's Supper, therefore, has a long history.

Even for those who barely know anything about the Christian faith, most have at least some idea that the Lord's Supper is basically a memorial. We look all around us, and we see that mankind has always had a desire to remember great heroes and important events from the past. Here in our own country, perhaps (as I have) **\*\*PPT\*\*** some of you have also been to the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC. It is truly an emotional experience to walk up the steps to that monument—the one that is pictured on the back of the \$5 bill—and to see the statue of Lincoln and then to look around and read those quotes from some of those great speeches that are engraved on the walls of that monument. If you have been to Washington, DC, then you have probably also seen the Jefferson Memorial, the Washington Monument, the names that are etched in the Vietnam Veterans' Memorial Wall, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in the Arlington National Cemetery, and more recently the World War II Memorial in the National Mall. All of these are very touching memorials, and yet we know that the world's greatest memorial was not designed by an architect or built out of marble. It is not a monument that will crumble with time or a statue that needs to be maintained, but the world's greatest monument is a very simple meal—originated in the mind of God and instituted by God's only Son who was crucified the next morning for the sins of the world.

As we think about the Lord's Supper, I would like to ask that we all turn together to what is actually the very first record of the Lord's Supper anywhere in the entire Bible. The account is found in the second half of **1 Corinthians 11**. **\*\*PPT\*\*** We need to understand that roughly 22 years had gone by since the Lord's Supper was first established, and in that very short amount of time, the church in Corinth had managed to twist it to the point where Paul needed to step in with a rather severe correction.

The early church had a tradition of eating together on a regular basis, going back to the first day of the church in Acts 2, and yet over time they had apparently merged their common meal with the Lord's Supper, and it was being abused. People would come to church to eat with their friends—the rich would eat first and would get all of the food, and the poor would go away hungry—not even having had a chance to partake of the Lord's memorial. The correction starts in **verse 17** and goes down through **verse 22**. Please notice the problem in the church at Corinth (**1 Corinthians 11:17-22**)...

***17 But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse. 18 For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part I believe it. 19 For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you. 20 Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper, 21 for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk. 22 What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? 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 will not praise you.***

And so the apostle Paul is brutally honest as he condemns the church for abusing the Lord's Supper. This morning, though, I would like for us to focus on the next paragraph, because Paul goes on to call them back to the original meaning of the Lord's Supper. And as he does so, he gives us the earliest record of what happened on the night before Jesus died. As Paul is about to point out, this account comes from Jesus Himself, and we know that the book of **1 Corinthians** was most likely written before the four gospel accounts. So, if you will, please look with me at the first written record of the Lord's Supper—**1 Corinthians 11:23-34**...

***23 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; 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 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." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. 27 Therefore whoever eats the bread or***

***drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. <sup>28</sup> But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. <sup>29</sup> For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. <sup>30</sup> For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. <sup>31</sup> But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. <sup>32</sup> But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world. <sup>33</sup> So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. <sup>34</sup> If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that you will not come together for judgment. The remaining matters I will arrange when I come.***

As we think about the Lord's Supper this morning, and as we look at this passage, I would like for us to consider four different directions that our thoughts should be focused during the Lord's Supper.

- I. **And first of all, we need to consider that our thoughts should be focused BACKWARD. **\*\*PPT\*\*** In other words, our thoughts should focus back into the past as we think about the purpose of the supper itself, as we think about the most important event in human history—the death of Jesus on the cross.**

Paul was quoting Jesus as he said that we should partake of the supper, "***...in remembrance of Me.***" How strange this must have seemed for men and women in Corinth who were not there in the first place. It is hard to remember something that we have never experienced. I do not remember the birth of your children—I was not there! And so for a better understanding of what Paul was saying, we need to look at the elements of the supper—the unleavened bread (representing the Lord's body) and the fruit of the vine (representing the blood).

We know that the bread has a long and distinguished history. We know that Jesus established the Lord's Supper immediately after the Passover meal. You may remember from the book of **Exodus**, that as the Israelites were getting ready to leave the slavery of Egypt, God's message was that all of the firstborn children in Egypt would die, but the angel of the Lord would "***pass over***" those families who sacrificed a lamb and painted the doorposts of their homes with the blood of that lamb. And just as God had promised, it happened. The firstborn were literally saved by the blood of the lamb. And then as they left the land of Egypt, God told them to make bread (without letting it rise), and they were to basically eat it on the run, as they escaped from the slavery. It was the first "drive thru" meal. They took their bread "to go." The Israelites had "take out."

I have read that in later years, many Jewish families would set an empty place for the coming Messiah as they celebrated the Passover meal. And so as Jesus and the apostles are eating the Passover, as Jesus takes the bread and the juice and as He

applies it to Himself, it would have had a huge impact. The apostles would have remembered that several times in His ministry, Jesus identified Himself as the **"bread of life."** Perhaps they would have remembered the temptation of Jesus by Satan in the wilderness, as Jesus quoted **Deuteronomy 8:3**, **"...that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD."**

And so there is a connection between bread and the word of God. Sometimes we sing the song, "Break Thou the Bread of Life, Dear Lord to Me." We remember the opening verses of John's gospel account, referring to Jesus Christ, **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God...And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us..." (John 1:1, 14).** The Word of God became flesh so that He could offer Himself as a sacrifice for our sins.

It is significant that the bread is unleavened. Several times in the Bible, sin is compared to leaven, or yeast. In **1 Corinthians 5**, as Paul spoke of church discipline, he refers to the Lord's Supper as he says, **"Clean out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, just as you are in fact unleavened. For Christ our Passover also has been sacrificed. Therefore let us celebrate the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."** As the bread of life, Christ is unleavened. He is without sin!

And so as we eat the bread, we remember the Lord's flesh. We remember how God became human for us. We remember how He left His throne in heaven to be born and placed in a manger. We remember His sinless life. We remember the words He spoke. We remember the miracles He performed. We remember His life on this earth. We remember the flesh of God's Son. We remember that the Lord's body took the punishment that we deserve. When Jesus said, **"This is My body, which is for you,"** we should know that the word **"for"** is a word meaning, **"for the sake of,"** or, **"instead of."** In other words, **"This is My body, which is instead of you."** We should have been there, but Jesus took our place.

In a similar way, when we drink the grape juice, we remember that Jesus paid a debt with His blood that we could never pay. We remember that God allowed His only Son to die in our place. We remember that Jesus shed his blood so that we can live. We remember His blood that was poured out for the forgiveness of our sins. From time to time, we might hear someone refer to the idea that the blood of Jesus was "spilt." No! It was not "spilt." It was "poured out." The sacrifice was intentional.

Paul spoke of Jesus in **Ephesians 1:7-8**, **"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace which He lavished on us."** In **Romans 3:25**, Paul speaks of Christ Jesus, **"...whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. This was to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed."** The blood of Christ paid the price and allowed God to **"pass over the sins previously committed."** And so

we are back to the idea of the Passover. The Jews were freed from slavery, just as we as Christians have been freed from our sins under the New Covenant—the Covenant that has been sealed with the blood of Christ. We remember what Paul wrote in **Romans 8:2**, ***“For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.”*** We have been set free from our sins.

The Lord’s Supper, therefore, is a memorial. It is something that helps us remember. Even though we were not actually there, we remember the most significant event in the history of the world. It is a simple memorial. Every culture can participate. It can be observed anywhere on the face of the earth. It is not something we simply look at, but it is interactive. It is a memorial that we touch, and taste, and see, and smell. And as we take the bread and the fruit of the vine, we hear the Lord say, ***“Take, eat, this is my body and my blood.”*** First of all, then, the Lord’s Supper involves a look backward into the past as we remember the death of Christ.

## **II. Secondly, we also find that the Lord’s Supper encourages us to look INWARD. **\*\*PPT\*\*****

If we look back at **verse 27**, we find that Paul warns that we must not partake of the Lord’s Supper in an ***“unworthy manner.”*** There are some very tender-hearted Christians who think that this means that if there is any sin in their lives, that they cannot partake of the Lord’s Supper. Not long after I began preaching, I started to notice that one Christian man was not partaking of the Lord’s Supper. He simply allowed the bread and the grape juice to pass on by, and so after a few weeks I asked him about it, and he said, ***“I am not worthy!”*** I very kindly explained that Paul was not talking about being worthy to partake of the Supper, because if we had to be worthy of the Supper, none of us could partake! In fact, that is the whole point of the Supper! If I was ***“worthy,”*** then I would not need the Supper in the first place! In reality, there is not a single accountable person anywhere on the earth who ***“deserves”*** what Jesus did on the cross. We are not worthy of the death of Christ.

And yet if we look very carefully at what Paul actually said, we find that he was referring to the ***“manner”*** in which we partake of the Supper! And so, in **verses 28-29**, we find that each individual Christian is to examine his or her own life. And so not only are we to think back to the Lord’s death, but we are also to think about ourselves. Perhaps we can think back to the time when we died, when we were buried, and when we were raised up again. We are to examine ourselves. We are to turn our focus inward.

One thing I have noticed here is that this is not a time for us to examine other people. This is not a time for us to think about how other people need to be doing better. This is not a time to think about how so and so is a hypocrite, or about how that person over there needs to get his or her life straightened out. But this is a time for examining ourselves.

This past week, I read about a state employment office out in Arizona, where officials had posted a full-length mirror, and directed to all job hunters, there was a sign over

the mirror, **"Would you hire this person?"** They were promoting at least some form of self-examination. If I were a manager, if I were the owner of a company, would I hire myself? That seems to be what Paul is encouraging here. We are to examine our own lives. Do I really appreciate what the Lord has done for me personally? In light of the cross, are there any sins I need to work on during the coming week? Am I personally thankful for the Lord's sacrifice?

The apostle Paul goes on to talk about sickness, and death, and judgment, and condemnation. We may not understand exactly what kind of punishment Paul is talking about (whether it is spiritual or physical), but we do know that it is not good to partake of the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner. Otherwise, it is possible for us to be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But again, the solution is not avoiding the Lord's Supper; the solution is to look inside ourselves as we think about the manner in which we are partaking of the supper.

### **III. Not only must we look backward and inward, but as we look at the entire section, we also see that we must look OUTWARD. **\*\*PPT\*\*****

Again, not that we need to go out looking for the sins of others, but we need to be aware that the Lord's Supper does involve sharing with other members of the congregation. This is one of those basic principles that the church in Corinth had failed to understand.

And so in response to their abuse of the Lord's Supper, the apostle Paul had to say (in verse 22), **"What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing?"** We have the picture of a poor man sitting over in the corner with a stale crust of bread, while the rich people are over on the other side of the room dining on the finest steak and lobster. Someone has rightly said that they were having potluck dinners, and that if someone did not have a pot, they were out of luck! Several years ago, by the way, I looked up the definition of "potluck" and the root of the word. Literally, it refers to "leftovers," and so I have tried to stay away from the word "potluck." I would rather call it a "fellowship dinner," or something like that. One preacher I know of refers to it as a "multiple choice dinner." But the point is, the Christians in Corinth had forgotten that the Lord's Supper was to include the entire congregation. The Lord's Supper was not to be a common meal for the purpose of filling up. It was never intended to eliminate physical hunger.

The Lord's Supper involves what the King James Version refers to as "**communion**." If you will, please look back with me at two verses in the previous chapter—1 Corinthians 10:16-17. In those two verses, Paul says, **"Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread."** The word "**sharing**" is the word that is sometimes translated as "**communion**." It refers to the fellowship that we have with one another as we all partake of the Lord's Supper.



I once heard someone describe how you can tell whether people in a restaurant are married or are dating. Those who are dating will be talking to one another, and those who are married will be eating in silence. I really hope that is not true, because when we eat a meal together we need to consider the people we are with. And in a similar way, as we partake of the Lord's Supper, we need to realize that we are all members of God's family. We should thank God for the unity that we have within the congregation. From time to time, we need to use the Lord's Supper to thank God for the relationships that we have with one another in the church.

**Verse 23** is rather interesting. Did you notice how Paul identified the night that Jesus established the Lord's Supper? He did not refer to it as the night before He died, but Paul said, ***"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...."***

In other words, even as Jesus established this meal as a memorial, He knew that He was sitting down with a man who would betray Him later that evening. And if the Lord could do that, then certainly we also should be able to get along with our own brothers and sisters in the church. Jesus knew what was coming, and yet He sat down and ate dinner anyway.

Was Paul condemning all fellowship dinners? No, he was not. But in light of the abuse in Corinth, Paul was basically telling them to knock it off and to thoughtfully consider their brothers and sisters in the church. He told them in **verse 33**, ***"So then, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another."*** When we eat the Lord's Supper, we are not stuffing our faces, we are not having a contest to see who can get the bread first, we are not focused on satisfying our physical hunger and thirst, but we are to partake of the memorial together. As it has been said, ***"There is level ground at the foot of the cross."*** We are to consider one another.

The Lord's Supper, therefore, is a sign of unity. It is like a team wearing the same color, or those in the same military unit wearing the same uniform. The Lord's Supper is a demonstration of our unity as a congregation. And so we are look outward. We are to look around at the other members of God's family. When we come to the Lord's Table, we are not alone—we are brothers and sisters in the family of God.

#### **IV. Before we close, I should point out very briefly that the Lord's Supper also involves looking FORWARD. **\*\*PPT\*\*****

In **verse 26**, please notice that Paul says, ***"For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes."*** In other words, this is something we will do from now until the end of time. As we know, however, the death of Christ is not the only thing that we proclaim, because by proclaiming His death, we are also affirming that Jesus is coming again. In other words, there was a death and a resurrection. To me, that sounds a lot like the

gospel! The gospel, of course, is the good news about the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And so, as we partake of the Lord's Supper, we are actually preaching the gospel. We are telling the world that Jesus not only died for our sins, but He is coming back some day! And just as His death brought forgiveness, the Lord's Second Coming will bring us to heaven.

The Lord's Supper, therefore, reminds us that we are not home yet. We are on a long journey, and we look forward by partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine.

### **Conclusion & Invitation:**

Before we come to the end of this morning's lesson, I should point out that sin is what separates us from God. Without forgiveness, no one can go to heaven. But back in **Matthew 26:28**, as Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, He referred to His, **"...blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins."** His blood was shed so that our sins could be forgiven. I find it interesting that that exact phrase, **"...for the forgiveness of sins,"** is found at least one other time in the Scriptures. It is found in **Acts 2**. Peter was preaching on the very first day of the church. He told those who were listening that they were personally responsible for killing Jesus. At that point, they interrupted Peter's lesson. The Bible says in **Acts 2:37-38**, **"Now when they heard this, they were pierced to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?' Peter said to them, 'Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'"**

If the blood of Jesus was shed **"for the forgiveness of sins,"** and if we are to be baptized, **"for the forgiveness of our sins,"** then it seems to me that baptism is where we come into contact with the blood of Jesus Christ. Through baptism (according to **1 Peter 3:21**), we are making an appeal to God for a clean conscience. If you have any questions, we would love to sit down and study the Scriptures. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know by coming to the front as we sing the next song. Let's stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: [church@fourlakescoc.org](mailto:church@fourlakescoc.org)