

¹⁷In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. ¹⁸In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. ¹⁹No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval. ²⁰So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, ²¹for when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry, and another gets drunk. ²²Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? Certainly not in this matter!²³ For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.²⁷ So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. ²⁹For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. ³⁰That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. ³¹But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment. ³²Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned by the world.³³ So then, my brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat, you should all eat together. ³⁴Anyone who is hungry should eat something at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment. And when I come, I will give further directions.

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

The Table: Six Layers of Communion

Lord, you have given us your word, and we thank you for that. It is the Word of God that you have inspired Paul to write. And we learn from your word how to be more like you and what you are like, and how those ahead of us have been corrected in the instructions that you want, not just for them, but for us. And so, Lord, I pray that you would be in our midst and with the power of your spirit. Would you bring things to light that we need to learn, and we need to grow? In Jesus' name, Amen.

Good morning! Our passage this morning is 1 Corinthians 11. This is a long passage, but I believe it is worth reading the whole passage. Paul sets the tone on not only the importance of the Lord's Supper but also the seriousness of it. Interestingly, Paul places the Lord's Supper as one of the primary reasons we gather. It is central to our focus in our gatherings. In discussing

the Lord's Supper, Paul talks about that moment when we break the bread and drink the cup. And for me, growing up, any time we had the Lord's Supper, I would always think back to the cross. But what Paul unpacks in this passage, is more than just looking back to the cross. He expands on the Lord's Supper presenting six different layers or elements.

Look Backward

Substitutionary Atonement. When we come to communion, we look backward. Look at verse 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." We look backward to the cross and what happened at the cross. We know this, but need to be reminded of the gravity of what Christ did for us. We call this *substitutionary atonement*. Jesus dies on the cross as a substitute for you and for me. Jesus died in our place.

Passed, Betrayed. I also want to look at verse 23. Paul says, "For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread" (vs.23) We don't see it in our translation, but these two words have similar meanings. To betray someone or to pass on to someone is to put something on someone's shoulders. We know Judas was the betrayer in that upper room. But in Isaiah 53 we see that God put the sins of the world onto the shoulders of Christ the Messiah. "He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem. Surely, he took up our pain and bore our suffering, yet we considered him punished by God, stricken by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was on him, and by his wounds, we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53: 3-6).

Forgiven. This is a powerful thing, that Jesus suffered pain and died in our place. He not only takes on our sins and our burdens but in Isaiah 53 we see that he also takes on our punishment. Jesus takes on the wrath. He takes on the justice. God is loving, but he's also Just. Jesus takes all of those things to bring about our healing. When we come to the table, we remember what happened to Jesus should have happened to us. We stand at the table with God's wonderful grace. I have no right to stand in God's presence. But at the same time, I have every right to stand in His presence because I am in Christ because of what He did. I love this quote, "We don't come to the table to get forgiveness. We come to the table because we are forgiven." It's an amazing truth of what Christ did for us. We come as forgiven people, looking back on what he did for us.

Look Forward

Hope. The second layer that I want to talk about is that we also look forward. In verse 26 he says, "Whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes." We look forward to when he will make all things new. There is hope in that perspective, hope in the day that Jesus promised he will return. Notice this, Jesus doesn't say, "Do this in remembrance of the cross." He says, "Do this in remembrance of me." All of me. Yes,

his death on the cross, but also, three days later—the resurrection, and then sitting at the right hand of God, and one day, his return. When we remember, we remember all of Jesus. There is hope in that.

Return! We look forward to the day when Jesus comes back. Then there will be feasts and celebrations. Which is pretty neat. I like feasts. Listen to these verses from Isaiah 25, “On this mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove his people’s disgrace from all the earth. The Lord has spoken” (Isaiah 25: 6-8).

Feast. In Matthew 22, the Kingdom of God is like a wedding feast. And in Revelation 19 John talks about the Supper of the Lamb. That's an amazing thing! Jesus is the bridegroom. We, the church, are the bride. When we come together there will be a wedding feast. When we take the Lord's Supper, it's just a glimpse of partaking in that feast. We look forward to the time when we will have a great feast, face-to-face with Jesus.

Perhaps you're coming to the table today after a tough week. Maybe there have been some hurts. Jesus is coming back! Our hurts of this world are not going to be forever. Jesus is coming back and he's going to make all things new. We celebrate that in communion. Yes, we come sober-minded and with reflection, but we also celebrate and look forward.

Look Inward

Repent. “Everyone ought to examine themselves” (v.28). Take time to stop and think. Paul says, when we don’t, some are getting sick and weak and even falling asleep—which means death. Many scholars don't agree on the meaning of this verse. Are they getting sick because of sin in their lives? What does that mean? It's a difficult passage to really understand. Some say this is referring to spiritual weakness and death. When we don't deal with sin in our life, spiritually, people are sick and spiritually dying. We need to examine ourselves to make sure we're right in God's presence. And that's only done through confession and recognizing what Christ has done for us.

Look Around

One Body. “For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ, eat and drink judgment on themselves” (v. 29). In chapter ten Paul compares the church to one body, and again in Chapter 12 with the giving of gifts. and also, 13 and how we love. We don’t do it here, but the early church shared a single loaf of bread. And as they peeled off a piece of bread, that piece is now one of many parts that make up the whole. In the same way, we are one body. Each of us is a part of the whole. In Christ, we are all part of each other. We need to look around at the needs of each other.

Share. Paul says to the Corinthians, “You're doing this wrong.” He says that wealthy people get there early—maybe they are managers or in charge. Or maybe they get off work early. But they

get there before everyone else and start eating and drinking all the wine. That's why they're drunk. And the poor people, who are probably working the fields, come later and all the food has been eaten and all the wine is gone! And Paul says some are going hungry! And essentially, Paul says, "stop being selfish!" He says, you are all just consumed with your own selfish needs and you're taking things from other people in the body.

Who can I help? We need to look out for the interests of other people. We need to ask ourselves, "Who do I need to share some resources with? Who is struggling? Who do I need to pray for? Who needs encouragement? Who needs help?" That's being part of the body—unselfishly looking at the needs of people within the body.

Who have I wronged? Paul is pretty serious about not coming to the table if we have something against someone else in the body. We need to deal with that. Or if I've been hurt by someone in the body, I need to address that. That can be hard to do when we take communion in a span of five minutes. Perhaps next time Debbie Bauder sends out the email reminding us of communion, take it seriously and prepare during the week. Maybe that's when you need to call someone and say, "Hey, can we have coffee this week? There's something I need to talk to you about."

Jesus takes this seriously as well. In Matthew five, Jesus says, "If you're offering a gift at the altar and remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift in front of the altar. Go and be reconciled to your brother, then come back and make the sacrifice." They have to leave it there and maybe go all the way out of town and deal with it!

Forgiveness and Reconciliation. Do we take this seriously? As believers, we should be the best at offering forgiveness and accepting forgiveness. We live in a world that is messed up. That kind of love speaks volumes as people watch that and say, "Wow, that is powerful!" Jesus says, "go and be reconciled to your brother." There's a difference between reconciliation and just asking for forgiveness. Paul seems to think we need to learn reconciliation if we're to take seriously the gravity of the Lord's Supper. Sending a text message is not reconciliation. We need to learn to meet people face to face and say, "will you forgive me?"

And we need to be a people that offers forgiveness. There's power in that. When we come to the table, we are there because of what Christ has done. I deserve nothing and I stand in God's grace, as do they. Perhaps you've been sinned against, or you've been wronged. Or maybe you need to release bitterness and malice. Sometimes we have a desire that someone will be punished. No way. We come to the table, we release it and offer forgiveness and we forgive. Jesus says, "if you do not forgive, you will not be forgiven."

Look Outward

Proclaim! "For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (v. 26). You are proclaiming the death and life of Christ. Actions speak louder than words. Jesus proclaimed the Gospel—"the kingdom of heaven is at hand." He vocalized the Gospel. But through his actions, he lived and proclaimed the Gospel by going to the cross so

that we might have forgiveness. That's a proclamation. He poured himself out. He opened himself up to the needs of the people. And we as followers of Jesus do what He did—proclaiming Christ through our words and our actions. Who is God calling me to pour myself out to? I proclaim the gospel in the words I use and how I treat others. Am I building up? We are changed people and we must remember that.

Look Upward

High and Lifted Up. “And when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, This is my body” (v. 24). What does that mean? When I go to the table, I *commune* with God. That's why it's called communion. The spirit of God shows up and I engage with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit points out sin in my life and refreshes me and renews me and reminds me of the gravity of what Christ did for me.

This has been misinterpreted for many years. Roman Catholics believe that in some metaphysical way the bread and wine literally become the body and blood of Christ of Jesus. And when you ingest that, you're literally ingesting the blood and the body of Christ. In essence, there's a sacrifice again. As Christians—Protestants, we differ from that. We *protest* some of those views. And that's why we had the Reformation. But sometimes when we can go so far to the other side and say, “it's just symbolic. It's just bread. It's lifeless, and it's just a religious activity.” But I don't think that's right either. And I can't explain it, nor does Paul really explain it. But I know when I got to the table and commune with God, I enter into something spiritual. God is here in a very powerful way.

We lived in Europe for a few years. And we visited a lot of cathedrals. The architecture has changed since the Reformation. Before the Reformation, the altar was front and center with the pulpit off to the side. But after the Reformation, the Protestant churches, put the pulpit in the front and the table off to the side. This illustrates an interesting difference between our theologies. Many Catholics think that the Lord's Supper is the life of the church. Protestants might say, the Bible is the life of the church. Who is right?

Neither. Jesus is the life of the church. When we go to the Lord's Supper, it brings us closer to Jesus. When we preach God's word, it brings us closer to Jesus. Jesus is central and He is the focus. Look upward. The authors of the Bible talk about God being up. What does that mean? I don't know, but I'm pretty sure that's a metaphor. God is high and lifted up. He's transcendent, high above all things. And he's worthy of our praise and our worship.

Lord God, I pray that as we come to communion today, you would allow us to look back and to remember the cross and be thankful that we are forgiven people, to look forward with hope and celebrate that you are coming back. And as we look inward, you will show us what we need to make right with you. Point out those relationships in our life that we need to make right. Or people we need to serve better or ask forgiveness of. Would you help us to look out? Give us the names and faces of people you want us to pour our lives into loving and proclaiming the truth of who you are. Be glorified as we do this. In Jesus' name? Amen.