
The People of God at the Table of the Lord

1 Corinthians 11:17-33

Russ Kennedy

The church at Corinth was a mess...

What was their worst offense...?

Their conduct at the Lord's table had brought upon them Paul's severest criticism and God's direst chastening.

Listen to this text:

¹⁷ But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. ¹⁸ For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, ¹⁹ for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. ²⁰ When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. ²¹ For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. ²² What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when 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 also he took the cup, 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 Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. ³⁰ That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. ³¹ But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. ³² But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

³³ So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another— ³⁴ if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for judgment. About the other things I will give directions when I come.

The Evidence of the Severity

“I do not commend you...”

“Your meetings are not for the better but for the worse...”

“In the night Jesus was betrayed...”

“Some are sick and some have died...”

Something has gone seriously wrong when the people of God met at the table of the Lord.

Their Experience of the Problem

“There are factions...”

Probably seeking preeminence because of the reference to Jesus being betrayed.

“Each has his own table, his own food, his own wine...”

Turning the Lord’s table into a religious festival like the pagan celebrations full of gluttony and debauchery.

“When you gather, wait for one another...”

Not waiting for all the people of the church to arrive at the gathering. The poor, the servants and the slaves were arriving after the festivities had begun.

They were not unified as they should have been. The way they did the Lord’s table brought it glaringly out. They had despised the church of God – that is, they had looked down on some of God’s people.

The Essence of the Sin

²⁷ Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. ³⁰ That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. ³¹ But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. ³² But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

Traditionally, when the elements are served, we are supposed to sit, think over our lives, confess any sin so that we are examining ourselves and taking the table in a worthy manner. Is this what this text is talking about? I think not.

What does this mean?

In an unworthy manner?

Not, hiding or harboring personal sin – no evidence in the text for that.

It is doing the Lord’s table in a manner unworthy of the unity of the body. It is doing anything that turns it into a privatized experience that effectively fails to recognize God’s people.

Without discerning the body?

Who are the body? It is God’s people, true believers. Two things are in view here:

Are you a part of the body of Christ? Only those who are believers who have made a public profession of faith through baptism should participate in the Lord’s table.

Are you affirming the body of Christ? Do you consciously open up your taking of the elements so that is all about us together?

Examining yourself?

To see if you have any breeches in the body – what is your attitude toward the people of God? Are you glad that everyone is here? Are you concerned about those who are not? Have you chosen to sit where you are so that you are not near or with someone else? Do you look down on someone gathered here? Do you really wish that person were not here? Do you see yourself as better than others gathered here?

Our Expression of Unity

So, we not going to partake of the Lord's table *individually*:

No privatized mystical “you and God” alone...

No morbid introspection and examination of your sins...

No not taking the table because you are not worthy...

So, we are going to celebrate the Lord's table *TOGETHER*:

Yes, assured that we are a part of the body of Christ, God's believing people.

Yes, affirming that we are one with all of God's people, regardless of natural, physical, social, economic, personal differences.

And, we are going to proclaim the gospel while we receive the elements:

²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

The Bread

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when 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.”

While we are being served, we will proclaim the gospel by blessing God for what His son's broken body received His wrath for in our place.

The Cup

²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

While we are being served, we will proclaim the gospel by blessing God for what His son's outpoured life in His blood has cleansed us from.

Reflect and Respond

Till Jesus comes... That says it all.

We are saved by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

We are joined to the body of Jesus.

We are unified as God's people growing to be like Jesus.

Notes