

Sermon Summary for 24-Jan-2010

1 Corinthians 11:17-34 / "Communion: Living and Proclaiming the Gospel"

>> From the Bible

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.

>> Notes

It is important for us to see how inseparable the message of the gospel is from the act of communion. Our practice of how we observe the Lord's supper is shaped a lot by our community and our tradition.

The practice of communion in the early church in Corinth might seem barely recognizable to us (see vs. 21). People were not getting fed and some were getting drunk. Clearly the practice was very different from today.

In first century Corinth, they would have met at night since it was a Roman city with no weekly day off. Church members would have met at someone's home, and communion would have been the culmination of worship and celebrated as a feast. Within a few generations, public worship had grown in size and consistency of time and place. As result, the Lord's supper took on a more formal part of the worship service to look more closely to how we celebrate communion today. For mostly pragmatic reasons, the full feast of the early church came to be represented by the simple elements of the bread and wine.

So, this picture of the early church's celebration is not intended to give us a fixed point of how to practice communion. As we saw last week, our community and tradition plays a large role in forming how we reflect fixed, biblical values. As a result, we should not be as hung-up on issues of the celebration of communion that have traditionally divided the church. Putting such importance of how we celebrate communion can often overshadow the substance of communion.

This text also teaches us that communion is the gospel embraced, proclaimed, and experienced (see vss. 24-26). These are some of the earliest recorded words of Jesus. It's important to know that when Jesus instituted communion, it was in the context of celebrating Passover. This was the Jewish celebration of God's deliverance of his people out of slavery

from Egypt. In instituting the Lord's supper, Jesus is the fulfillment of the Passover. God saves his people, his judgement of their sin passes over them, because of the blood of Christ, the Lamb of God. In this sensory act of communion, we "proclaim the Lord's death"—we proclaim and embrace the gospel to ourselves and to others. We also experience it. Our souls are strengthened.

See vs. 20- The Corinthians made a joke of communion by how they were treating each other. Things had gotten so bad, that even though they had the forms of communion right (the bread and wine, instruction, etc), Paul did not consider it to be the Lord's Supper because their practice with each other was so uncharitable. There is a real sense in which our actions are confirmation of whether the gospel is at work in us.

See vs. 18. People in Corinth were abusing their freedom in Christ and causing great divisions—and to such a degree that it was invalidating communion. And so instead of being a celebration of our unity in Christ, the Lord's Supper had devolved into a time that highlighted the divisions of the church.

See vss. 21-22. These divisions occur between the rich and the poor. They were meeting in the homes of wealthier people. And for many poor in the church, the feast of communion was the only significant meal they would get all week. But there was segregation, people being left-out and humiliated because they were poor. The Bible is quite clear on the connection between believing the gospel and caring for the poor.

This shows that we are prone to making the wrong kind of distinctions. The Corinthians were setting up distinctions between rich and poor where there should be none. Our relationship to money and how it affects our relationship to others is a key indicator how we are believing (or believing) the gospel.

To "discern the body of Christ" refers to our ability to see our own priorities in light of the sacrifice of Christ. In light of God's mercy to great sinners like us, how are our attitudes shaped and re-oriented towards our sin, towards others, and towards what we value, treasure, and put stock in?

>> Questions for Discussion

- Paul describes communion as a true, effectual means of grace (or sacrament) and yet, simultaneously, the need for a person to receive communion by faith. Do you tend to struggle more with downplaying communion as a true, unique display of God's grace, or by downplaying your need to receive communion by faith? Or said another way, do you put too much stock in the ritual itself, or in your right attitude? How does the gospel balance these two extremes?
- What do you think might be some distinctions and divisions that we make in our church community that the Bible does not? Where do you see the fallout from those unbiblical distinctions? What is motivations behind those distinctions?
- What would it look like for you to "discern the body of Christ" this week? What might you value and treasure to such a degree that it has surpassed your estimation of Jesus' sacrifice for you? How might Christ sacrifice change how you view and manage your money (be specific as possible)? How might affect how you relate to those in need (be specific as possible)?