



1 Corinthians 11:23-34
How to Come to the Lord's Table

23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread;

24 and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me."

25 In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

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

27 Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.

28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

29 For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

30 For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep.

31 For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.

32 But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world.

33 Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.

34 But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come.

Paul has spoken of the disorders in the Corinthian practice of the Lord's Supper, how they had taken a meal that was essentially supposed to show their communion with one another and how they had made it a source of discord and disunity.

They were so abusing the sacrament of the Lord that it ceased to be a blessing to them and instead became a curse. Corinthians coming to the Lord's table would no doubt arise from that table as often as not angry at one another, some of them having been shamed, others having disgraced themselves through gluttony and drunkenness.

What were they doing? They were partaking of the Lord's Supper in an unworthy fashion. Their Lord's table manners, were abominable and openly repudiated the sacred principles that the Lord's Supper was designed to convey. Whether or not they were unbelievers, they were eating and drinking in an unbelieving fashion that repudiated their profession of faith. They would not have been doing anything substantially worse if they had been sleeping through the preaching of the Gospel, or talking constantly with a group of friends, or perhaps even active heckling the preacher.

So what Paul does is he tells them first what the Lord's Supper really is, and then tells them in no uncertain terms who should be coming to it and in what manner. Before I begin to discuss the words of

Paul it may help to have summary of what he is going to say about the supper before us and I can give no better summary than that of Thomas Watson who wrote answering the question “What is the Lord’s Supper?: ***“It is a visible sermon, wherein Christ crucified is set before us; or, it is a sacrament of the New Testament, wherein by receiving the holy elements of bread and wine, our communion with Christ is signified and sealed up to us; or it is a sacrament divinely instituted, wherein by giving and receiving bread and wine, Christ’s death is showed forth, and the worthy receivers by faith are made partakers of his body and blood, and all the benefits flowing from thence.”***”

First Paul begins by reminding them of what are called the Words of Institution. As an interesting aside this record of the institution came significantly before the writing of the first gospel, this is probably the first written record of the Lord’s Supper in the Bible.

Paul tells them that what he instructed them regarding the way they were to practice the supper was what the Lord had given to him, this is not some traditional feast of human origins, the Apostles did not say to themselves, wouldn’t it be nice if we remembered the Lord with a meal. Now he does that to add a necessary solemnity to the meal. This isn’t a dinner party, this is the Lord’s commandment, and He adds he gave them the Lord’s Supper on the night when He was betrayed to point out that Christ so loved them that even on the advent of His darkest moment He was providing a blessing of incalculable worth. It also shows them that Jesus was betrayed by his closest followers on the night of the institution of the Supper, and where they not in a sense repeating that betrayal by acting more like the people who crucified Christ than those celebrating the benefits of the Crucifixion?

Paul records that on that night of the Last Passover Jesus took bread and broke it and gave it to his disciples saying “this is body which is for you, do this in remembrance of me.” Now these words have been used historically as a support for beliefs such as the Roman Catholic doctrine of Transubstantiation, which teaches that the bread of the Lord’s Supper literally becomes the flesh of Jesus Christ and the Wine literally becomes his blood, even though the elements still appear to be bread and wine.

That simply cannot be the case, Jesus was standing before the Apostles, at that moment he did not suddenly start as part of his body became bread and was consumed. Neither did the Apostles appear to take it that way, Jesus had frequently said things like “*I am the door of the sheep*” and “*I am the true vine*” and at no point did they think he was saying *I am a plant* or *I am made of timber*. Now the fact that they are symbolic does not in any way remove the spiritual reality behind the words. The church really is the *bride of Christ* but we do not get dressed in wedding dresses in order to come to church.

The Apostles no doubt understood that Christ was speaking symbolically. The bread signifying His body that was about to be crucified as a propitiation for their sins. The wine signifying His blood which was about to be poured out to cleanse them from their sins. Also interestingly enough, Christ here doesn’t say that wine is literally his Blood, but that it is the New Covenant in *His blood*. Advocates of transubstantiation simply will not find proof for their theory in the words of Christ here.

He also instructed them to do this, or actually in the Greek it is present continuous, *keep doing this* in remembrance of me. This was instituted to be an ongoing regularly held event in the life of the church. A visible sermon reminding the church of price of their salvation as well as reminder of their union with Christ. And it is something that is to be done, until the Lord comes again. The Lord’s Supper is a meal that will go on until Jesus returns and the Church enters into the marriage supper of the Lamb.

Then we will no longer have need of it, because our spiritual communion with Him will be forever replaced with actual communion with Him in His presence.

As you come to the table though, you do not do this in a passive or unthinking way. Every year or so citizens of the Roman Empire were required to burn a pinch of incense before an image of Caesar and declare that they believed “Caesar is Lord” – many citizens did this in a perfunctory and unthinking way similar to the way that some children say the pledge of allegiance without meaning any of it. But Christians could not do it, because they believed that only *Jesus is Lord and Savior*. And time after time they had come to His Table professing before all the World their belief that Christ has Died, Christ is Risen, Christ Will Come Again. If Baptism is the meal where the promises of God are displayed to the believer, then the Lord’s Supper is the meal in which we once ago reaffirm our promises to God. We are saying we believe the Gospel, that we are His Children who have benefited from his atoning death, who keep His Commandments and await His return. It is for that reason that Christians do not actually need to keep walking the aisle to recommit themselves at the front of the church. Properly understood, you renew your covenant with the Lord every time you come and commune with Him at the table.

That is why if someone cannot yet profess their faith in the Lord, and enter into Covenant with Him for themselves, they should not come to the table. To do so, would be to come in an unworthy manner. And for that reason we do not invite the unbelieving or children who have not yet been examined by the Elders and admitted to the Supper to come to the table.

To come to the Supper without knowing the Lord, believing in Him, and having joined yourself to His Body the church, would be to eat and drink in an unworthy manner. Similarly as Paul has already made manifest, to eat and drink as if it was your own Supper acting in a profane manner is also to come in an unworthy fashion. The way the Corinthians were coming, even though they were adult members of the church, was a repudiation of the supper and seriously called into question whether they really were believers.

That is why Paul calls upon them to examine themselves, to see if they really are in the Lord, or if they have only been playing at being Christians. Did they simply view this as a ritual snack, some bread, some wine, some words? If so, then as he points out, they did not discern the Lord’s Body in the meal, they did not understand the importance to them of what the bread and wine symbolized and they did not rightly partake of communion.

IF that was the case, then as Paul started out saying in verse 17 they were literally *coming together not for the better but for the worse*. Each time they came they cursed themselves, calling the chastening of the Lord who will not be mocked down upon themselves.

We need to remember brothers and sisters, that there is not one of the means of grace that is neutral, they are all powerful things and not to be trifled with. Every single one is either a blessing, if taken in faith, or a curse. Even the word as it is preached either calls and builds up those who receive it with faith, or hardens those who deny it. Your Baptism is a blessing to you if you by faith have the spiritual reality it signifies, otherwise if you are baptized but unbelieving at the end of time it will stand against you in the judgment.

Paul says that because they have been profaning the supper, the Lord has chastened them with illness and even in some cases with death.

Therefore they ought to be examine themselves, to spiritually discern whether they are in the Lord:
2 Cor. 13:5 Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not know yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? -- unless indeed you are disqualified.

What are you and what ought you to be? How do they match up? Are you in the Lord? There was no self-examination going on in Corinth and as a result the Lord was judging them. But even that judging in their midst was designed to wake them up, it was the father's love to turn them from their course.

Finally he concludes they must stop their current practice, they must esteem others more highly than themselves, they must wait for the other members of the body to arrive before eating, even the poor ones. This is the Lord's Table, if you are too hungry to wait, eat at home, but don't profane Christ's table. There were other problems in their administration of the supper, but those could await the apostles coming to be fixed, these problems however could not wait.

While I could make many applications of these verses, and I hope you have been making them, I think the critical one is summed up in the words *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.*

There are some people who have never sat down and actually examined the state of their faith

I hope you have done that, and continue to do that. It is not perfect faith or perfect repentance that is required or absolute sinlessness of conduct. Examine yourself to see basic things, am I a believer? Most importantly perhaps, examine yourself to see *DO I LOVE CHRIST?* Do I love the Brethren?

This meal is for sinners, but sinners saved by grace who love the Lord.