

## Table Manners

Growing up family meals were special to our family. It was increasingly challenging with a family of 3 boys that played sports year round, but I can remember my mom as often as possible, making sure that we had the whole family around the dinner table.

There's something special about the family gathering together. It says something when you all sit around a table. There's a spiritual significance in sharing a meal together. Maybe like Thanksgiving meal coming up.

But at the same time, family gatherings are not always optimal. They tend to bring out the best or worst in us. Some meals are great and symbolize love, fellowship, and unity, and others witness by the gathering or absence of the gathering to the absence of love, and unity in the family.

In a similar way the Corinthian Church, when they gathered to eat at the Lord's Table, they were witnessing not to godliness, but to wickedness. And to make the matter all the more telling, this was the way they acted while celebrating the Lord's Table, which was a high point of their worship.

And it's to this matter that Paul wants to address that we will look at this morning. Essentially we are going to see Paul lay out the problem, then the instructions that Jesus gave, and then a warning if they do not repent.

Though the focus of today is on a very specific event in the life of the early church, the greater principle we will see today is that our worship of Christ must correspond to our love our brothers and sisters in Christ. Let's pray.

### The Problem at the Table

**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. 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, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. 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.**

Paul is continuing a discussion of their corporate worship. Last week he covered head coverings. This week he is talking about the Lord's Table.

He says, in this matter, I do not commend you because when you come together its not for the better, it's for the worse. You'd be better off to not even gather.

What's he talking about, well he brings back up this issue of divisions that he has been pounding since chapter 1. He then says this is necessary, not that it is good, but necessary to prove who of you are genuine or not. These divisions are so serious that it is revealing the true believers. (you may not be saved)

And these divisions are manifesting themselves when they come together. So what kind of divisions are going on and why's Paul so upset?

Well we first got to understand how the Table functioned with the early church. The Lord's Table was a celebration that took place within the context of a meal. This may be what the "love feasts" refer to, where christians would all come together basically for a potluck meal, and each as they could, would contribute to the meal.

But Paul is saying, when you guys get together to eat, you aren't even eating the Lord's Table.

Why?

**“For in eating, each one goes ahead with (consumes) his own meal. One goes hungry another gets drunk. 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.”**

What's going on here is that at this worship celebration, at the Table, there was divide between the have's and the have-nots, between the rich and the poor.

It is not that these first people are just rushing through the line and the others don't get a chance to eat, it was actual segregation based on who had access to the food. The rich people were eating all the food. That is what is meant by going ahead with their own meal. Scholars debate exactly what this means or looked like, but it is likely that these were considered private meals. The rich had access to not only privileged foods but portion size as well.

EXAMPLE: Fellowship Hall. It would be like if we all gathered into the Fellowship Hall for our family lunch, and there was such a difference in socio economics that some were able to bring great food and others could hardly contribute, if with anything. The folks that brought all the food, well, they don't offer it to us, and instead they just share it with each other. We are left with nothing, or very minimal amount. While the other partied!

Exactly what goes down we aren't told, but the point is that some were getting their fill, and others were going hungry. Paul draws the extremes, **“one goes hungry another gets drunk.” And the effect... the despising the church of God and humiliating those who are poor.**

The pinnacle of worship was turned on its head for selfish gain. That's not the Lord's Table Paul says. If that's how you are operating, don't think you are taking the table.

So that's the problem, you have this church that is gathering and taking the Lord's Supper, and when they do, they manifest sharp divisions between one another, and to this Paul says, they are no longer even celebrating the Table and it would be better if they didn't gather in the first place.

Now he's going to lay out to them the correction. Look with me at the instructions for the Table as they were delivered to Paul and let's look for the mismatch, why the current Table manners of the Corinthians is not in accordance with these instructions...

### **The Instructions for the Table**

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

The first thing we are pointed to here is to when Jesus instituted the The Lord's Table, which the context of is very important.

You see, this night when Jesus was betrayed, was the very night when Passover was celebrated by the Jews.

Passover was the Jewish celebration in remembrance of when God brought Israel out of slavery to Egypt.

While still in slavery, God told every Jewish household to slaughter a lamb without defect and to take the blood from the lamb and wipe it on the door post. Then when the Destroyer comes he will pass over every house with blood on it, but houses without blood he will strike down the firstborn son.

In this way the Jews then were led out of Egypt. And every year the Jews would celebrate the event by sacrificing a lamb without blemish. They would also eat unleavened bread, which was called the bread of affliction, remembering the affliction of their fathers.

Centuries pass with this tradition fixed firmly in place, and Jesus' initial words, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." would have shocked the disciples, because instead of calling it the bread of affliction, He puts forth Himself, Jesus is now substituting himself as the bread.

So the Lord's Table is pointing to the Passover, but it's also doing something else, it's pointing to covenant. It says, **"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.'"**

This deserves a brief overview of covenant, beginning with Abraham, when God made a covenant to Abraham saying, I will be your God and bless you and make you into a great nation, and you will be a blessing to all the nations. In that covenant ceremony there was the slaughtering of animals, divided in half, a slaughtering that basically was a sealing God's promise in blood. Saying, "if this covenant is to be broken, I shall be as these animals." The covenant confirmed in blood.

It was later re-established to Moses - after the Law was given to Moses, they make sacrifices to God and it says "Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, "Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words." -Exodus 24:8

But there is a problem with the covenant... it can't take away sin. Man keeps sinning.

The covenant again confirmed in blood.

Hundreds of years go by and then the prophet Jeremiah speaks,  
*"Behold, the days are coming, declares the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, my covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, declares the LORD. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the LORD: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, 'Know the LORD,' for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the LORD. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more."*

six more centuries of waiting on the Lord with growing anticipation, until as John Stott says, "one evening in an upper room in Jerusalem a Galilean peasant, carpenter by trade and preacher by vocation, dared to say, in effect, "This new covenant, prophesied in Jeremiah, is about to be established; the forgiveness of sins promised as one of its distinctive blessings is about to become available; and the sacrifice to seal this covenant and procure this forgiveness will be the shedding of my blood in death."

The center piece in the Lord's Table is the Lord's death. As Jesus says, **For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.**

"The Lord's Supper . . . dramatizes neither his birth nor his life, neither his words nor his works, but only his death. Nothing could indicate more clearly the central significance that Jesus attached to His death. It was by His death that He wished above all else to be remembered. There is then, it is safe to say, no Christianity without the cross. If the cross is not central to our religion, ours is not the religion of Jesus." -John Stott

Everything you do at the meal is shaped by the cross! it's central!

So after Paul lays out their issue he then puts forward the instructions of the Lord's Table as a corrective measure. Next, Paul gives them a warning regarding their Table manners.

### The Warning at the Table

**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. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.**

**So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for (welcome) one another— 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.**

Paul is now applying the Table instructions to the Corinthian context with this warning.

And there's a few issues with this text we have to tease out. The first is this idea of unworthy. What does it mean to take the Lord's Table in an unworthy manner? That's what the Corinthians were doing, and it's a serious matter, for it leads to guilt and judgment.

Some people have taken this to mean that they must be "worthy" of the Table. Which leads to endless introspection and for some, to not end up taking the table. That couldn't be further from the truth. The whole point is that you aren't worthy of the Table, the sacrifice of Christ is given to you for the very reason that you are unworthy. Your unworthiness is the point of Christ's sacrifice. That's why we need the Table. So what else could Paul mean here?

I think the use of the word "unworthy" is tied to the previous verse, **"For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes."**

Remember Paul is writing into the context of the Corinthian church which was doing what, they were gathering as the church and celebrating the Lord's Table, but doing so separating themselves into the haves and have-nots. Is that a proclamation of the Lord's death?

Proclaiming the Lord's death is not merely a proclamation that Christ died, but it's proclaiming all that He obtained in His death. How by His death He has created a new humanity, how he forgave and redeemed sinners, poured out grace and mercy, tore down divisions, and unified persons across every barrier possible, socio economically, racially, or any other possible line, all being equal at the cross.

How can you be proclaiming the atonement of Christ, this wonderful, free, gracious salvation, if in your proclamation you do so with divisions among you? That's why he would say it's your own meal that you celebrate, not the Lord's.

Paul says, instead, when you come to the Table, stop, examine yourself, and then... eat of the bread and drink the cup. He assumes that if you examine yourself you will be led to take the Table correctly. In other words, the question is not whether you should or should not take the Table, but in what manner should you take the Table?

Faith in Christ's death leads one to embrace God's radical love for you, which can only be given to others.

That how is with faith in the life death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. And this is the vertical dimension to the Table, but there is also a horizontal dimension as well to the Lord's Table, and just like there is vertical and

horizontal component to salvation. The Scriptures so intimately wed our faith in God and our actions toward others. Almost as if they are one and the same.

We are saved by faith alone, but that faith is never alone, it's a faith that works. That works itself out in how we love others, and especially the household of faith.

“the unworthiness lies in a lack of living active faith in the atonement which has been achieved by the death of Christ; and this is the *source* of the various moral disqualifications by which the celebration of the Supper may be dishonored (Meyer Ed. 3). Among these we may mention a selfish, unloving conduct as one of the chief—such conduct as the rich at Corinth manifested towards the poor, and which exhibited a striking contrast with the love of Christ shown in the sacrifice of Himself for all, and set forth in the Holy Supper wherein the benefits of it are extended to every one.”

I think this is why Paul continues this line of thought ...

**For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.**

What does the body refer to and how are we to discern it? body of Christ the church.

I think a major clue is found in 1 Cor. 10:17

**“Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.”**

“Paul is not advocating that only the sinless can be members of the Christian community; rather, he is concerned about those who persist in the very activities from which they have been freed through the sacrifice of the Paschal Lamb (v. 7). Christians belong to the new age; their lives have been invaded by the Holy Spirit. They are therefore to “celebrate the Feast,” that is, to live out on a continuing basis the ethics of the new people of God. They are to look like their Lord in their behavior, for which purpose the example of the apostle has been given to them (4:16–17). Because in Christ all things are new by the Spirit (2 Cor. 5:14–17), those who belong to Christ must put off their former way of life (Col. 3:5–11). Those who persist in that former way of life, not those who simply struggle with former sins, do not belong to this new community. By their own actions they have opted out; the community must distance itself from such people for its own sake. .. *(the church) is a reflection of the essential nature of the community of the Spirit, which is to be different from the world in which it lives.*”

“The Lord’s Supper is not just any meal; it is *the* meal, in which at a common table with one loaf and a common cup they proclaimed that through the death of Christ they were one body, the body of Christ; and therefore they are not just any group of sociologically diverse people who could keep those differences intact at this table.” -Fee

Fee - “Here they must “discern/recognize as distinct” the one body of Christ, of which they all are parts and in which they all are gifts to one another. To fail to discern the body in this way, by abusing those of lesser sociological status, is to incur God’s judgment.

**For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.**

When we eat of the Lord’s Table we are examining our faith in the death of Christ but we are also checking ourselves in relation to the church body. Am I actively betraying my faith in Christ in the absence of love and unity for others in the congregation?

**So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for (welcome) one another— 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.**

When you gather, he says, display your salvation, welcome one another. If you are hungry, which likely means, if you want to gorge yourself and enjoy a rich persons meal, do that at home. When you come to the church, it's about sharing for the sake of love and unity and gospel proclamation.

Just as you were welcomed to Jesus, so give everyone a full welcome to the Lord's Table.

**Conclusion:**

Harvest Church, how do you take the Table? Where is your heart in the Table? If there is ...

broader application, we don't stop being the church when we aren't taking the Table, so what are we proclaiming? Do you think you are better than someone else in this church? More important? More significant? More worthy of respect and honor? You have just risen up in judgement over your brother and sister. Everyone in this church should own, "I am the chief of sinners" and we would be alright.

You see, chief of sinners don't come in to the feast and gorge themselves at the expense of others. They gladly get in the back of the line. They gladly serve when no one is watching. They speak highly of others and are quick to shut down gossip. They are quick to forgive and walk in humble love. They are characterized by thankfulness and praise. when they see a brother and sister in Christ they see someone for whom Christ has died.

That's the type of behavior that proclaims the Lord's death until He comes.

Our only hope in living this kind of life is Christ. Christ is our feast. Feast on Christ and welcome others to this glorious banquet.