



Communion: When a Meal Becomes an Event!

INTRODUCTION

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

When I think about communion, I'm reminded of what it's like to cater an event. Catering isn't just about the food—it's about creating a space where something meaningful can happen. Whether it's a wedding, a celebration, or a family gathering, the food sets the stage for deeper connection and shared experiences. It's more than just grilling pork chops or chicken—it's about creating an atmosphere that invites people into something greater.

Communion is the ultimate “catered” meal, but in *1 Corinthians 11*, the Corinthians had lost sight of what it was meant to be. Instead of using this meal to honor Jesus and deepen their unity as believers, they were letting division and selfishness take over. Some were feasting and drinking to excess, while others—likely the poorer members—were left with nothing. Paul doesn't hold back in his correction: “Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing?” (v. 22).

Paul's rebuke reminds us that communion isn't just about us as individuals; it's about the community of believers. The Corinthians were approaching the Lord's Supper as if it were just another meal to fill their stomachs, but Paul reminds them—and us—that it's much more. Communion is a sacred moment where we proclaim the Lord's death until He comes again. It's not just about remembering Jesus' sacrifice—it's about living in light of it. That means showing the same love, grace, and humility to one another that Jesus showed to us.

Think about it: when you're preparing an event, every detail matters because you're creating an environment where relationships can flourish. Communion does the same thing. It creates a space where we can come together as the body of Christ, unified by His love and sacrifice. But just like the Corinthians, we can get distracted. Maybe we come to the table harboring grudges or focused on our own concerns. Maybe we're not thinking about the people around us or the profound grace Jesus offers through this meal. Paul challenges us to examine our hearts before we take communion (v. 28) so that we can approach the table with humility and gratitude.

Communion is also a moment to reset. Life gets messy, and relationships can strain. But when we come to the Lord's Table, we're reminded that Jesus' sacrifice didn't just reconcile us to God—it reconciles us to each other. It's a powerful opportunity to let go of bitterness, division, and pride and embrace the unity we share in Christ. The Corinthians were focused on themselves, but Paul calls them—and us—back to the heart of this meal: Jesus, who gave everything to bring us into fellowship with Him and with one another.

So, next time you come to the Lord's Table, slow down and reflect. This meal isn't just bread and grape juice. It's a sacred space where Jesus meets us, nourishes us, and unites us. It's a chance to proclaim His love, embrace His grace, and be reminded of the community He's called us to. Let this meal challenge you to approach others with the same love and humility that Jesus has shown you.

BREAK THE ICE

Describe your favorite dining experience. What made it special (food, setting, occasion, people)?

READ IT

Read 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

EXPLORE IT

1. What severe problem did Paul address in this passage?
2. What is accomplished by eating the bread and drinking the wine?
3. What is the result of partaking of the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner?
4. What did the illness and death suffered by the Corinthians reveal about God's attitude toward communion?
5. What advice and instructions did Paul give to Christians preparing for communion?

APPLY IT

This is one of the only places in the Bible where we read that God's people gathering together was "not for the better but for the worse" (1 Corinthians 11:17). That should give us a clue that something seriously dysfunctional and wrong was taking place in the church as they assembled. Paul hints at two sides to the same problem and each is called out by the words "when you come together." The first aspect and the bigger issue is general disunity and factions and the second aspect is the practical concern with how they were administering communion. It appears that the division expressed in communion was also related to those who were well off and those who were poor because the poor were being "humiliated" (1 Corinthians 11:22). The particular issue around the Lord's Supper is that a group who would gather ahead of time and take their fill of the bread and the wine and leave out others in the church. Instead of building up one another the church was fractured and selfish.⁷

- 6. Thinking of a time when you were invited to an event or activity that was designed to draw everyone closer and the opposite happened, what caused this to take place?**

- 7. Paul uses strong language to describe the negative impact of the Corinthians' gatherings. What are some ways modern churches might unintentionally gather "for the worse"? How can we ensure our gatherings build up the body of Christ?**

Of course, the divisions at the dinner were but evidence of the deeper problems in the church. The Corinthians thought they were advanced believers, when in reality they were but little children. Paul did not suggest that they abandon the feast, but rather that they restore its proper meaning.⁸

- 8. Considering contemporary examples of divisions or factions that can arise in the church, how do we go about addressing these particular issues to promote unity within the body of Christ?**

⁷ <https://westhills.org/blog/2021/10/06/1-corinthians-11-17-34-study-guide-the-lord-s-supper>

⁸ Be Wise (1 Corinthians): Discern the Difference Between Man's Knowledge and God's Wisdom by Warren Wiersbe

The Corinthians were operating in self-deception when they came together to observe this sacred communal meal. In reality, when they gathered it was “not to eat the Lord’s Supper” at all (v. 20). What is the apostle’s evidence? “For at the meal, each one eats his own supper” (v. 21). Their self-focus meant “one person is hungry while another gets drunk!” (v. 21). The Corinthians were guilty of letting their rich take precedence over their poor and of gluttony. Perhaps being influenced by the pagan festivals they once indulged in, the wealthy gorged themselves. All the while the poor (many of whom were probably slaves) went hungry, receiving little or nothing to eat and drink because it was soon gone. Wiersbe is almost certainly correct: It is likely that the weekly agape feast was the only decent meal some of the poorer members regularly had; and to be treated so scornfully by the richer members not only hurt their stomachs, but also their pride. (Be Wise, 115) Paul is outraged by such selfish and sinful behavior and delivers a stern rebuke in verse 22: “Don’t you have homes in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?”⁹

- 9. Paul rebukes the Corinthians because their self-centeredness turned the Lord’s Supper into a selfish feast rather than a sacred communal meal. What are some ways a focus on self might distort our own worship practices or attitudes today?**

- 10. Paul addresses how money can create divisions among God’s people, highlighting the way economic status can lead to favoritism and inequality within the church. Why does money so often divide us, and how can we guard against falling into the same trap today?**

⁹ Exalting Jesus in 1 Corinthians (Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary) Dr. Daniel L. Akin and James Merritt

Evangelical churches recognize two ordinances established by Jesus Christ for His people to observe: baptism and the Lord's Supper. (The Supper is also called the Communion, as in 1 Corinthians 10:16, and the Eucharist, which means "the giving of thanks.") Jesus Christ took the cup and the loaf—the ingredients of a common meal on that day—and transformed them into a meaningful spiritual experience for believers.

- 11. How do Baptism and Communion complement each other in proclaiming the Lord's salvation, and why might Baptism be an important first step before participating in the ongoing practice of Communion?**

- 12. How does knowing the different names given to this event help us to understand the fullness of this momentous occasion?**

The Lord's Supper gives us an opportunity for spiritual growth and blessings if we approach it in the right attitude. What, then, must we do if the Supper is to bring blessing and not chastening? Warren Wiersbe reminds us of three truths¹⁰:

First, we should look back (vv. 23–26a). The broken bread reminds us of Christ's body, given for us; and the cup reminds us of His shed blood. It is a remarkable thing that Jesus wants His followers to remember His death...However, this "remembering" is not simply the recalling of historical facts. It is a participation in spiritual realities. At the Lord's Table, we do not walk around a monument and admire it. We have fellowship with a living Savior as our hearts reach out by faith.

13. When you partake in Communion, what does it mean to you to "remember" His death as more than just recalling facts but participating in the spiritual reality of His love and grace?

Second, we should look ahead (v. 26b). We observe the Supper "till he comes." The return of Jesus Christ is the blessed hope of the church and the individual Christian. Jesus not only died for us, but He arose again and ascended to heaven; and one day He shall return to take us to heaven. Today, we are not all that we should be; but when we see Him, "we shall be like him" (1 John 3:2).

14. How does the hope and anticipation of Christ's return shape the way you approach Communion and your daily faith journey?

¹⁰ Be Wise (1 Corinthians): Discern the Difference Between Man's Knowledge and God's Wisdom by Warren Wiersbe

Third, we should look within (vv. 27–28, 31–32). Paul did not say that we had to be worthy to partake of the Supper, but only that we should partake in a worthy manner. At a Communion service in Scotland, the pastor noted that a woman in the congregation did not accept the bread and cup from the elder, but instead sat weeping. The pastor left the table and went to her side and said, “Take it, my dear, it’s for sinners!” And, indeed, it is; but sinners saved by God’s grace must not treat the Supper in a sinful manner.

15. What does it mean to partake in Communion “in a worthy manner”?

16. How can self-examination and repentance deepen your experience of the Lord’s Supper?

Finally, we should look around (vv. 33–34). We should not look around in order to criticize other believers, but in order to discern the Lord’s body (1 Cor. 11:29). This perhaps has a dual meaning: We should discern His body in the loaf, but also in the church around us—for the church is the body of Christ. “For we being many are one bread, and one body” (1 Cor. 10:17). The Supper should be a demonstration of the unity of the church—but there was not much unity in the Corinthian church. In fact, their celebration of the Lord’s Supper was only a demonstration of their disunity.

17. Paul challenges the Corinthians to discern the Lord’s body both in the bread and in the church. How can we become more aware of Christ’s presence in the church around us? What steps can we take to engage in a deeper sense of unity and love within our church community during Communion?

18. As we consider the rich dimensions of the Lord’s Supper—looking back at Christ’s sacrifice, looking ahead to His return, looking within ourselves for repentance and renewal, and looking around to embrace unity in the body of Christ, let us ask:

- **Where do you feel strongest in your approach, and where might you need to grow?**

- **What encouragement or instruction can you learn from others in our small group to help you approach Communion more intentionally and meaningfully in the future?**

- **Who is God calling you to commune with in even greater ways?**