

October 3, 2021

God's People Gather: Lord's Supper – 1 Cor 11:23-27

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Would you rather watch your favorite sports team play in-person or in the comfort of your home? Would you rather have a meeting with your kid's teacher in-person or virtually? Would you rather go to the doctor's office when you get sick, or would you rather have a telehealth appointment? I was talking to a friend of mine last week who actually preached on these same verses from 1 Corinthians, and we talked about how since the pandemic, the different things we do in our lives tend to fall into one of three categories: 1) There are things done better virtually. 2) There are things done virtually but aren't quite as good as doing them in person. 3) There are things best done in-person. Where you list the things that I mentioned before might depend on your own personal preference, but sometimes not. A dental cleaning needs to happen in-person.

Over the last four weeks, we've been emphasizing that church is best done in-person. Can it be done virtually? Yes. Sometimes it needs to happen out of necessity. It's comforting to know the Word of God that is shared over the internet is powerful and effective, and it convicts people of their sin and comforts them with the gospel. Yet, we've talked about how there's something special about physically being here with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, and so I would place that in the second category myself.

What about the Lord's Supper? Over the last 18 months, and especially in the weeks that started the pandemic, I know many of you wondered about the Lord's Supper. Can the Lord's Supper be done virtually? Maybe the better question, should it be? There are churches in our area that have attempted to do that – that they had their people take some bread and usually some grape juice, and then during the virtual service, they would eat and drink it. Is that a good way to celebrate the Lord's Supper? Is that keeping in line with what God's Word says about it? God's Word does not directly address this specific issue. And so today let's study what God's Word says about the Lord's Supper – what it is, how we celebrate it, and why God gives this special meal.

During the summer sermon series, we saw how the Apostle Paul went around the Roman empire sharing the gospel, people coming to faith, and churches getting started. That's what happened in a city called Corinth, and afterwards he writes a letter to them to encourage them in their faith but also because they had some problems. One of their problems was how they were celebrating the Lord's Supper: **"When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk...what shall I say to you? Shall I praise you for this? Certainly not!" (1 Corinthians 11:20)**

There were some going hungry. There were some getting drunk. What a sad abuse of the Lord's Supper! What abuses do you think we struggle with? Maybe it's that we go through the motions and don't take time to prepare our hearts to receive the Lord's Supper. Maybe we fall into the habit of it and view the Lord's Supper as something we have to do without cherishing the blessings of it. Maybe we wrongly think that the fact that we celebrate close Communion here and ask only people of our fellowship to partake of it that it somehow makes us better or more worthy in God's eyes. We take the Lord's Supper...we don't always cherish it...and sometimes it's easy to think of it as something other than a meal offering us grace and forgiveness.

So how do we correct those things? We repent first of all, but then we take time to study what the Lord's Supper is. Let's work through this lesson from 1 Corinthians 11. **23 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night 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, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. 27 So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. 28 Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup.**

Before celebrating the Lord's Supper with these Corinthians, Paul takes the time to instruct them. **"For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you..."** He didn't just show up with unleavened bread and grape wine and said, "Ok, let's go." He instructed them. He takes them to the upper room and shares the words of institution. **The Lord Jesus, on the night 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, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."**

Paul taught them what Jesus taught his disciples in the upper room – that a person who takes the Lord’s Supper receives four things – bread and wine and the very body and blood of Christ. **“This is my body.” “This cup is the new covenant in my blood.”** When you come and take the Lord’s Supper, through the power of God’s Word, Jesus gives you his body that was nailed to a cross for you and his blood that was shed for you.

What are the essentials of the Lord’s Supper? Kneeling at a Communion rail? No. Communing in rows like we did before the pandemic? No. There certainly may be good reasons to do that, but those things aren’t essential. Here in 1 Corinthians and every time throughout the New Testament and Early Christian Church where the Lord’s Supper is mentioned, these were the essentials parts: believers physically gathering together, consecrating the elements (setting aside the unleavened bread and grape wine) and saying the words of Institution and receiving, eating, and drinking. Every time it has those parts to it – whether it’s 400 people in a sanctuary or whether it’s a pastor visiting a shut-in. The Lord’s Supper was something Christians did together, not separately, not privately by myself.

While the Bible doesn’t specifically address virtual Communion, when it comes to the Lord’s Supper, there is always a physical gathering together whether it’s 2 people or 200. Notice when Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper, he didn’t say, “Take and eat THAT is my body...Take and drink THAT is my blood...” He said “Take and eat THIS is my body...take and drink THIS is the new covenant in my blood.” Because when we celebrate the Lord’s Supper here, we’re consecrating (setting it apart) THIS bread and THIS wine, not bread and wine that may be located across the country or even the world.

Why is it important? We don’t want people to doubt what they’re receiving, and we want them be certain that when they receive it, they are receiving Christ’s body and blood and the many blessings he gives. Jesus gives you himself and as you gives you his own body and blood, he gives you forgiveness. You might be thinking, “Well, is that any different than the forgiveness that I received in baptism or as I hear God’s Word,” and the answer really is no. You might be wondering then, “Well, why would Jesus give us the Lord’s Supper then? If hearing that Jesus died for sins assures me of my forgiveness, why do I need to take the Lord’s Supper?”

So think of it in this way: 14 years ago on July 28, 2007 I told a woman that I loved her and that I will always love her. And amazingly, she said the same thing to me. Do you think I tell her that I still love her? Do you think that I still try to show her that I love her? Well, yeah...I certainly don’t do those things enough, but it’s important that husbands and wives continue to reaffirm their love and continue to show it. Because if we don’t, we’ll start doubting and questioning it.

God knows you better than anyone else knows you. He knows that you have a sinful nature. He knows how much you struggle with sin in your life. He knows how Satan is trying to sow seeds of doubt in your mind and in your heart about whether your sins are forgiven. He knows that this world that we live in sometimes leads us to be frightened and scared about the future.

And so what does God do? He is not simply content to tell you, “I love you. Jesus died for you. Your sins are forgiven. Let’s be done with that now!” No, he gives you that forgiveness and that love in tangible ways for you to experience. In water and through the power of Word, he washes away our sin in baptism. In the Lord’s Supper, he gives you Jesus’ own body and blood so that you can taste your forgiveness and that the Lord’s love for you will never fail. Jesus’ body and blood assure your guilt is paid for, Satan cannot accuse you of sin anymore, and nothing in all creation can separate you from your Savior and his love.

There’s one more blessing to consider: When you celebrate the Lord’s Supper here, you are saying something to the people all around you. Whether you are celebrating here, or whether you’re a shut-in, and a pastor comes and brings church to you. You are, Paul says it, **“proclaiming the Lord’s death until He comes.”** You are confessing that you together believe that Jesus lived, died and rose for you. You are confessing that you believe that your very sins are forgiven. You are confessing that when you die, because Jesus lives, you also will live. You are confessing that filled with God’s love for you, you are going to leave church with an increased love for one another. What a meal! What a foretaste of the heavenly banquet! The true unity and peace that God gives us as a church family!

Could God have instructed to celebrate the Lord’s Supper privately without a fellow believer or believers present? Sure, but he didn’t. Because he wanted his people to gather around the most important message you could hear: Through Jesus, your sins are forgiven. Heaven is yours. Amen!