

The Village Church – Rancho Santa Fe
Week #14 – Adult Bible Study

I Corinthians 11:17-34

January 14 & 15, 2025

11:17-22

1. In the section of text that begins here, Paul continues to address the new way of life incumbent upon followers of Jesus, specifically as it relates to divisions and disunity among the believers, a way that has been “inherited” in some sense from their old way of life prior to faith in Christ
2. In this section, there is a particular example of their behavior that illustrates their immaturity: the way in which they celebrate the Lord’s Supper
3. V17 – whereas in some cases Paul encourages and applauds their behavior, here, Paul must discourage and correct their behavior – something that pastors are wary of doing
4. Modern Christians must understand what “the Lord’s Supper” was like in the earliest days because it was something quite *different* in many respects from the modern ritual
 - a. There were no church buildings and only the beginnings of formal liturgy
 - b. Believers gathered in homes, probably the larger ones, owned by the wealthier members
 - c. A typical Roman-style house would have a “dining room” capable of holding about 10 people – all others would be outside this room in the entry ways
 - d. Common practice was for those of highest status to be in the dining room, eating and drinking the best, while others relegated to the outside rooms would have less and worse fare
 - e. Believers would actually eat meals – not just tiny morsels served up in trays while sitting in pews
5. The *problem* that presents here is that the Christians in Corinth *maintained* the distinctions of social class and privilege as they conducted what is arguably the most important single “act” of Christian worship: the act of remembering Jesus’ death through the agency of the Supper
6. Some Corinthians were eating their fill of rich food, others were going hungry or eating lesser quality: and the impact is to highlight and continue their social division
7. When the Christians “come together” (synerchesthai) to eat, they *do not* come together as a community of equal believers before their common Lord
8. This divisive behavior (and divisive attitude underneath it) serves, in a backhanded way, to serve a positive purpose: it reveals who the “true believers” are and are not
9. Again: Paul expresses pastoral condemnation of such behavior

11:23-26

10. To correct this behavior (and bad theology!), Paul teaches what the Lord’s Supper is all about
 - a. Along the way, Paul gives to the larger church a clear summary of what was believed, taught, and practiced by the first Christians
 - b. His words have often been *taken out of context* and thus their meaning has been changed in the historic believe and practice of the church
 - c. Here, we can recover their original sense, and the true meaning they proclaim
11. V23a – Paul is passing on the tradition, the news, the practice, that he learned from others, and in this way, he is transmitting what has come from the Lord himself
 - a. Remember: there were no written Gospels at this point – everything about Jesus is oral tradition
12. V23b – We should give attention to the term “handed over” (paradidomi). The literal translation of this passage is: “*For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was handed over took a loaf of bread....*”
 - a. This translation emphasizes that Jesus was given/sent by God (as God) to die for us
 - b. Jesus was “handed over” to death as a voluntary act (not just because he was betrayed)
13. Twice, Paul emphasizes that the meal is about *remembering*
 - a. Some early thought held that the church should perform this act in order to remind God of Jesus’ sacrifice
 - b. But...clearly...this act is meant to remind the Church of Jesus’ sacrificial death
14. The remembering is about:
 - a. Acknowledging Jesus’ *absence* at the present time, which requires *remembering* that he was here and what he did while he was here

- b. Acknowledging the *hope* of Jesus' presence with us again
- 15. Paul sees the meal as proclaiming two things:
 - a. The sharing of the Supper calls the church to think again about Jesus' death for others
 - b. And it calls the church to remember the New Covenant that is thereby created in his death.
 - i. This New Covenant creates a new relationship:
 - 1. Between God and God's people
 - 2. Among God's people with each other
- 16. The new relationship among God's people is *not* embodied or proclaimed when the Corinthians maintain their class distinctions in the event of the meal itself: and that's the problem

11:27-34

- 17. With this section, Paul moves from explanation of the source and meaning of the Meal to a few thoughts about how the Corinthians can *correct* their practice according to the *true* theology that he has shared
- 18. Again, subsequent church theology and practice has often taken these few words out of context and made them to be something they are not
- 19. What does it mean to eat and drink in a *worthy* manner?
 - a. This has been taken to mean that *the person who partakes* must somehow be worthy of receiving the Lord's sacrifice – but this is *not* what Paul meant
 - i. Further, *no one is worthy*, and that is precisely the point of Jesus' sacrifice: he had to die for us because we could not in any other way find our way back to God (by being worthy)
 - b. What this *does* mean is that *worthy* partaking/participating has to do with partaking/participating in such a way that the *community* is gathered in equality
- 20. V29 – to “discern” the body means to understand that *all* of the gathered Christians – regardless of social status – are equal before the Lord and thus to be considered and treated as equal among each other
 - a. To do otherwise is to maintain the division of the church
- 21. To fail to discern the community (the Body of Christ) is an offense against Christ himself
- 22. Paul goes so far as to say that the divisive belief/practice of the Corinthian church has brought disaster among the believers: they are weak, ill, dying
 - a. This is not a theology that says God punishes bad behavior in a necessarily direct or corollary fashion, but it does say that bad behavior has consequences
 - b. Because of this, the community itself is exhorted to police its own belief and behavior
- 23. Another Greek word needs further consideration: *ekdechesthai* – often it is translated as “wait for” but it can/should also have the impact of saying “wait for in order to receive and share with” others. Paul is likely encouraging the Corinthians to suspend all social/class distinctions in the practice of sharing the meal so that they will literally share as equals, with the rich doing some giving and the poor doing some receiving
- 24. Paul ends this section acknowledging that there are “other things” that need attention – but they will have to wait for his physical presence in Corinth. And...you and I will never know what these things were.

Questions for Your Life Today

- A. How do you and I learn to “hear from” Jesus by hearing from the theology, history, and tradition of the Church, but without inheriting misconceptions and bad practice along the way?
- B. What are the advantages and disadvantages of conducting the Lord's Supper in the way that we do today?
- C. What are other ways that the social/class/educational/other divisions among believers are evident in the church today?
- D. What are some practical ways that divisions among believers can be addressed?
- E. Has this study helped deepen your understanding of the Lord's Supper? How?

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Resources:

- Interpretation Commentary on First Corinthians, Richard B. Hays, John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1997
- Interpretation Commentary on Second Corinthians, Ernest Best, John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1987
- The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of I Corinthians – Life in the Local Church, David Prior, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 1985
- The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of 2 Corinthians – Power in Weakness, Paul Barnett, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, Illinois, 1988
- The Communicator's Commentary, 1, 2 Corinthians, Kenneth L. Chafin, Word Books, Waco, Texas, 1985