

Communion and Community

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

The self-centeredness of the Corinthians undermined their own growth, unity in the church, and their corporate witness in the community.

ILL –Michelangelo and his David – *“There was a man inside and I just cut away everything that didn’t look like him so he could be seen.”*

This is what Paul has been doing. Throughout the letter, he has been chipping away at the ‘self’ that so dominates the Corinthians lives so that Jesus could be seen.

Their egotism is evident throughout the letter, and it continues in their abuse of the Lord’s Table.

First: Paul’s Complaint. 17-22

In 11:2, Paul commended the church for keeping his teaching and traditions. Where he could be, he has been generous with his praise. But here, he offers no praise for them in this matter.

11:17 – The way they share the Lord’s Table does more harm than good.

11:18 – It’s ironic that you have ‘divisions’ when you come together for ‘communion.’

5:2 - *And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn?*

11:19 – The only real benefit to their abuse of the Lord’s Table is that it had given “genuine” believers who serve the body, the opportunity to be “approved.”

20 – Evidently, the Corinthians had turned communion into supper.

21 – Their communion was conflicted with conflict, those who ate it sincerely and those who ate supper. The very meal that was supposed to bring them together had revealed their carnality and divisions.

21a – *“his own meal,”* means that, in the end, they had taken the Lord’s table from the Lord and made it all about themselves.

ILL – We are God-centered congregation.

- Jesus is the only Seeker and so our gatherings center on Him
- We teach the Bible to people, not people the Bible.

21b – In the end, the Corinthians deprived each other of basic food. How terrible.

- 22 – a) They were abusing the Lord’s Table
 b) They were despising the church
 c) They were humiliating those who had nothing to eat

This is once again about preferring our brothers and sisters. It is one of the most basic Christian principles.

Note: Last Wednesday night we centered on Jesus’s statement to Pilate about his kingdom not being of this world. There are two kingdoms in conflict – the kingdom of God and the kingdom of people – as the reversal of *Roe v. Wade* has clearly demonstrated. The world is visibly demonstrating its ethic of hatred. Contrarily, at his arrest, Jesus told Peter to put away his sword because God’s kingdom does not advance by taking life but by giving it (which is what the “*My body, my choice*” abortion debate is really all about anyway). How does it? This Wednesday, we’ll be looking at the ethic of God’s kingdom and talking about how we respond to hateful people.

22c - Summary of this section: Contrary to 11:2 – “*Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.*”

Second: Jesus’s Pattern. 22-26

V 23a - “*For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you...*” That is an excellent definition of Christianity and a summary of discipleship.

This is what spouses do, what parents do, what friends do, co-workers do.

We are not authors, or editors, but mailmen. We don’t write or change the divine message. We simply deliver it.

IMP: v 23b - Almost as an aside, Paul mentions “*...on the night when he was betrayed...*” He could have written that sentence without mentioning the betrayal. It flows very well without it.

“For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus...took bread...”

The betrayal is extraneous to his point. Or is it? This reminder causes his Corinthian audience gasps. They remember that Judas betrayed Jesus, and they are all in horror at the heinousness of that crime; “*We would never,*” they cry!

But, haven’t the Corinthians betrayed God and each other in their abuse of the Lord’s table? Isn’t every act of obedience an act of betrayal? It’s all-to-easy to point the finger at someone else’s betrayal of Jesus and minimize our own duplicity. In effect, Paul is saying, “*Don’t gasp at Judas. Gasp at yourselves. Judas deprived Jesus of life. You have deprived each other of the sustenance of life, food, as well as honor and fellowship.*”

24 – Contrarily, see how the Lord’s Table is not about me but all about Jesus? *“This is my body...do this in remembrance of me.”*

25 – *“This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this...in remembrance of me.”*

In those two reflections (vs 24-25), Paul draws the Corinthian’s attention from themselves to the cost Jesus paid to save them from themselves.

A God-centered life is a life-saving life.

Christ at the center, balances all of life.

V 26 - The purpose of the Lord’s Table is to *“proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.”* It is his selflessness that saves us, and it is our selflessness that sanctifies us.

- Past - *“In remembrance of me”*
- Present - *“You proclaim the Lord’s death”*
- Future - *“Until he comes”*

T - **Luke 22:14-30** – See how easily, how quickly, life can become about us.

Few things demonstrate the depth of our depravity than turning God’s grace into self-adulation.

Third: Paul’s Warning. 27-32

27 – The context defines what Paul means by *“an unworthy manner:”*

- making the Lord’s Table all about me to the neglect of Jesus
- and those around me.

This self-righteousness is what Paul means by *“guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord.”*

Think about what Jesus did with his body and blood –

Hebrews 2:9 - But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

A self-centered attitude is contrary to the Gospel which is all about the surrender/sacrifice of self.

IMP - 28, 31 & 32 - The only individual aspect of the Lord’s Table is self-examination.

29 – “without discerning the body” can refer to:

- a) The body of Jesus, which Paul has just mentioned. Communion is all about Christ
- b) Or, the body of Christ, others at the Table. How you treat brothers and sisters is how you treat Jesus.

Whichever way you interpret, both are essential to participating “worthily” in the Lord’s Table.

30 – Disrespect can end in illness and even death. Isn’t that interesting? In trying to save their lives, making a meal of the Lord’s Table, those Corinthians lose their lives. But that’s where the ‘me first’ life always ends, losing and not gaining.

Paul summarized the appropriate attitude in,

Philippians 3:7-11 - But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith— ¹⁰ that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Fourth: Applying the Text. 33-34

- a) V 33 – Wait for one another (it’s about others)
- b) V 34 – Eat at home (it’s not about you)

Communion satisfies a different kind of hunger, the need for a God-centered life and the body of Christ.

Conclusion:

The Lord’s Table re-enacts the Gospel,

- Past – Christ has died
- Present – Jesus is with us
- Future – the Lord is coming

It is a public declaration of our love for Jesus and one another, one in which the Corinthians are miserably failing.

Let us make it our priority not to be our priority, but to center our lives on Jesus and others.

Community Groups:

- 1 – Read the text.
- 2 - Where in the Bible do we see the first act of self-centeredness? (Lucifer)
- 3 – How did Adam and Eve demonstrate pride?
- 4 – How did Cain’s sacrifice demonstrate pride? (He thought it up/was not as God instructed)
- 5 – What was the first example of ‘cancel culture’ in Scripture? (Cain’s murder of Abel)
- 6 – Why did Cain murder Abel? (To silence Abel’s voice. See Gen 4:10)
- 7 – Can this help explain why the world is so angry about the reversal of Roe v Wade?
- 8 – What is Paul’s complaint to the Corinthians?
- 9 – How does their behavior demonstrate self-centeredness?
- 10 – What phrase proves Paul’s point? (v 21)
- 11 – What is the end-result of the Corinthian’s behavior? (v 22)
- 12 – Why might Paul mention Judas’s betrayal of Jesus when confronting the Corinthians about their abuse of the Lord’s Table?
- 13 – How does v 23a summarize discipleship?
- 14 – According to vs 24-25, what is the Lord’s Table all about?
- 15 – How does the Lord’s Table point to the past, present and future?
- 16 – How is a God-centered life a life-saving life?
- 17 – What does ‘unworthy’ mean in the context of this chapter?
- 18 – How does the Lord’s Table re-enact the Gospel?
- 19 – IN what ways do I demonstrate a Corinthian, ‘me-first’ mindset?