

1 Corinthians 11.17-34: Lordship

Irregularities at the Supper [vv.17-22] Its Chaos Rebuked

v.17: “Now” indicates the beginning of a new section. In the ‘instructions’ that follow (to the end of the chapter), Paul was not able to “praise” the saints. They had been commended for respecting Paul’s apostolic authority and desiring to be generally obedient to his teaching (v.2), but he could not commend them for their behaviour and attitude towards one another as they gathered. In fact, their “coming together” (used *seven* times between **11.17** and **14.26**) did more harm than good. The gathering which brought them together to express fellowship was instead becoming an occasion of friction, and the bringing of the governmental dealings of God upon them (see v.34). **v.18:** The phrase “first of all” highlights Paul’s primary concern. There is no mention of any secondary concerns here, but he does reference setting “the rest” in order on his next visit (v.34). When they gathered together “in church”, that is, in assembled character (not in a particular ‘religious’ building), there were “divisions” (*schisma*) among them. They were assembled *outwardly* as one (in a physical sense), yet *internally* they were ‘torn’ (split). Earlier in the epistle, the divisions were based on ‘party loyalties’ to certain teachers (cf. **1.10-17**; **3.1-3**); here they were social, between rich and poor. Division in a local church is a sure sign of spiritual sickness and carnality. The comment “and I partly believe it” suggests that Paul, whilst not doubting the truth of the reports, had hopes there might be some exaggeration involved.

[**v.19:** This verse is a parenthesis to explain why God allows divisions to rise amongst His people. The word “must” normally refers to a *divine necessity*, as in its *two* uses in the remainder of the epistle (**15.25**, **53**). This does not mean that God is the author of division, but He can overrule such evils to manifest those who have His approval. The word “heresy” (*hairesis*) does not mean false doctrine (as it does in English today) but comes from a root meaning ‘choice’ – it therefore describes a small group of people with the same beliefs (or opinions), often contrary to the majority (see **15.12** for an example at Corinth). If unchecked, this can lead to a “division” (*schisma*) or ‘tear’ (split) in the body (cf. **12.25**). “Approved” (*dokimos*) is to put to the test, as precious metals tried in the fire, and prove genuine or pure. The approved will always *seek* the unity and *resist* the division of the people of God, and neither will they be swayed by any divisive teaching or practice.]

v.20: After his brief digression (v.19), Paul returns to the matter at hand. Their gathering together as an assembly into one location was “not to eat the Lord’s supper”. Though they *claimed* and *believed* they were eating the Lord’s Supper, it was not possible because they were divided and therefore denying its fundamental principle of fellowship. The gathering had lost its true character and original meaning. It could no longer be properly called the “Lord’s Supper”. As noted earlier, the word “Lord” (*kuriakós*) is an adjective meaning ‘belonging to the Lord’ and is clearly set in contrast to “his own supper” (v.21). It only occurs in one other place where it is used for the “Lord’s Day” (Revelation **1.10**). Christ is therefore the *author* and *subject* of the Supper – it is in *honour* of Him and takes *character* from Him. This is a dignified occasion. The word “supper” described the chief meal of the Jews, Greeks and Romans taken at or towards evening and often prolonged into the night. This was the longest, more leisurely meal of the day when family and guests spent time in conversation and reflection. It may also be called a “supper” because it was instituted by the Lord in the *evening* (v.23; John **13.30**). Morally, we are in the *evening* of the Lord’s absence (Romans **13.12**) – and keep the feast “till He come” (v.26), which will herald the glorious dawning of a new day. **v.21:** Paul now explains why their gathering could not properly be called the “Lord’s Supper”. In gathering for a ‘love feast’, the rich were eating and drinking sumptuously, while the poor were neglected and hungry. “One taketh before” (*prolambanō*) could have a temporal force, suggesting the rich arrived before, and did not wait, for others (cf. v.33) but probably indicates they ate their “own” private meals, in social clusters, not sharing with others. Thus, at one extreme, the poor went “hungry”, and, at the other, the rich were “drunken”. Such was the outrageous disorder. **v.22:** Their coming together for a preliminary social feast was a confusing of the *home* sphere and the *church* sphere. The place for eating private and communal meals was the home, not the place where the “church of God” gathered. The assembly was no place for social feasting. Whilst it is good for Christians to enjoy one another’s company in a social setting, it is better to separate *social* gatherings for eating etc. to the **home** and reserve the church’s **place** of gathering for the *spiritual*. Sadly, people are much more interested in the social than the spiritual – and this must not be our primary motive for “coming together”. In selfishly feasting as they did, they were showing contempt for the honour of the “church of God” (and by implication, God Himself) by ‘humiliating’ (degrading) those who had nothing. In all this, they could not be commended!

Institution of the Supper [vv.23-26] Its True Character Revealed

The Atmosphere (v.23). This is likely the first written record of the institution of the Lord’s Supper, First Corinthians being written approximately *five* years before Luke. The best remedy for disorder is to return to the original – whether

the headline of original *creation* (as with headship, cf. vv.7-9) or original *institution* as with the Lord's Supper. Nothing must contradict what was established at the very beginning. The words "received" and "delivered" often describe the passing down of oral teaching (cf. **15.1, 3**) – in this case, from the Lord Himself (in the upper room), through the Eleven to Paul then the Corinthians. However, the language is better suited to describe a *personal* and *direct* revelation from Christ to Paul as he uses the emphatic "I" (cf. Galatians **1.10-12**). All the great truths connected with the church as the body of Christ were specially given to Paul. This truth had already been "delivered" to these saints, but an exhortation to return to the simplicity and dignity of its practice was clearly required again. Though Matthew says "Jesus" took bread (**26.26**), Paul uses the title "Lord Jesus" – God has made Him such, and it never befits His people to call Him anything else. The word "betrayed" means 'deliver' or 'hand over' for Judas was conferring with the Jews over the final arrangements of His arrest (John **13.30**). The *imperfect* (passive) tense brings a vivid sense of *solemnity* and *dignity* to the occasion – this was the very night in which Christ was 'being delivered up'. What a contrast to the careless attitude of the Corinthians! But then, the attitude of some Christians is not much better today. Many are unprepared, arrive late, have nothing to offer and find it difficult to stay awake. "The very night on which the evil of man rose to its height the unselfish love of Christ was most blessedly displayed. When lust led to the betrayal, love instituted the Supper" (Smith).

The Aim (vv.24-25). First, the Lord "took (a very common Greek word to guard against the introduction of *ritual*) bread" (cf. Luke **22.19**) and gave it new significance. The bread He used was the Passover *matzah* which was *unleavened* (as commanded by the Law), *striped* (to make it more brittle and palatable) and *pierced* (allowing air to escape and thus impeding fermentation). If any of these elements were missing, it was disqualified from Passover.

- In taking this bread, the Lord Jesus said, "this is my body". The bread therefore symbolises the *body* (and, by implication, the *person*) of the Lord Jesus given "for" us in death. The Passover lamb they had just eaten in the Upper Room was called 'the body of the Passover', but now the Lord Jesus speaks of His *own* body. He was literally *unleavened* (1 John **3.5**), His body was *striped* by a Roman scourge (John **19.1**; cf. Isaiah **53.5**) and *pierced* at Calvary.
- The bread therefore reminds us, primarily, of His suffering for our sins in His body. Indeed, the unleavened bread of the Passover was called "the bread of affliction" – reminding Israel of their suffering in bondage in Egypt.
- By implication, the bread also reminds us of the incarnation and the glorious fact that "the Word was made flesh".

"This is my body" is a phrase which has given rise to serious error. Roman Catholics understand the saying in terms of *transubstantiation*, i.e. that the elements *become* the body and blood of Christ, though to the senses they are still bread and wine. But this is not true. The word "is" means 'represents' as in "the field *is* the world" (Matthew **13.38**). If the bread was *literally* the body of the Lord Jesus, then he was standing before the disciples with *two* bodies!

Though some ancient texts have the phrase "broken for you", most translations (such as RV, JND, ESV & NET) omit the word "broken" because of a lack of reliable manuscript evidence. This agrees with Luke's account over which there is no doubt (Luke **22.19**). Additionally, scripture is quite clear that not one bone of the Lord Jesus was ever broken (John **19.36**). There does not, therefore, seem to be any symbolic significance in the physical breaking of the bread.

Believers are to 'keep on' (present continuous imperative) doing this "in" (unto) a "remembrance of me". Keep on doing what? Give *thanks*, *brake*, *take* and *eat* the bread. In so doing we are obeying the command of the Lord Jesus and remembering Him. The very act of observing the Supper is itself the remembrance. Note that we come to remember a **Person**! Moses exhorted the people of Israel to remember the *day* of their deliverance from Egypt (Exodus **13.3**). On the Day of Atonement, the people were sadly caused to vividly remember their *sins* (Hebrews **10.3**) – but we remember neither a day, nor our sins – we remember the Person who died to put them away! The word "remembrance" means a 'vivid calling to mind'. This is not just recalling an *event* or *person* but recapturing as much of the *reality* and *significance* of Calvary and Christ as possible. Whilst we will obviously remember what Christ has done for *us*, the focus of the Lord's Supper is the **person** of the Lord Jesus – not just what He has done, but who He is. We can remember His various *names* (Psalm **20.7**), His *works* (1 Chronicles **16.12**), His *love* (Song of Solomon **1.4**) and His *words* (Acts **20.35**).

The bread is not a *type* of Christ, but a **symbol**. Types point *forward*, whereas symbols remember a reality *already accomplished*. If the bread was a type of Christ it would need to be unleavened (to symbolise His sinless perfection, as an unblemished OT sacrificial animal). In fact, if Paul wanted to stipulate unleavened bread exclusively, he would have used the word *azumos*. Instead, he uses *artos*, meaning *any* loaf of bread (leavened *or* unleavened). Knowing all the bread (and the cup) symbolised, the Lord Jesus "gave thanks" (*eucharisteō*). He was, in effect, giving thanks for Calvary!

v.25: In like manner, the Lord Jesus took and gave thanks for the "cup". This was after "he had supped", i.e. after the Passover supper had concluded (cf. Luke **22.20**). As previously noted, this was likely the *third* cup of the Passover (of which there were *four*) relating to the third promise of Exodus 6.6-7, "I will redeem you". The institution of the feast was *subsequent* to, and *distinct* from, the Passover feast. This was the institution of something new that has superseded

the Passover. “This cup” stands by *metonymy* for its contents, i.e. the wine. In scripture, the word “cup” symbolises a ‘portion’, either of *blessing* (10.16) or *judgment*. Jeremiah 25.15: “*For thus saith the LORD God of Israel unto me; Take the wine cup of this fury at my hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send thee, to drink it.*” Perhaps Paul uses the word “cup” to evoke a sense of all Christ suffered in drinking the portion of divine judgment that was due to the whole question of sin at Calvary. The portion we enjoy from the benefits of His death is immeasurable blessing, “*my cup runneth over*” (Psalm 23.5).

The wine within the cup represents the “blood” of the Lord Jesus which speaks of life given up in sacrificial death (cf. Hebrews 9.12). This is blood that was “poured out for you” (Luke 22.20, RV), to accomplish the “remission of sins” (Matthew 26.28). Together, the cup and its contents represent the “new covenant” which was ratified and sealed by the blood of Christ. The background is the ratification of the old covenant by the blood of animals recorded in Exodus 24.8: “*Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words.*” But the inauguration of the “better” covenant required a “better sacrifice”!

Christ has inaugurated a covenant that is “new” (*kainos*) in *quality* and *type* – not merely an adjusted or patched-up old covenant. Hebrews 8.6 refers to this new covenant as “better” in its terms. The first covenant was a *conditional*, two-sided affair which promised blessings and curses dependent on obedience. The second covenant is a one-sided affair in which God has pledged *unconditional* blessings which rest on the finished work of Christ at Calvary. This second covenant will be made with the “house of Israel and Judah” after they have been planted back in the land of Israel (Jeremiah 31.31-34). But as believers of the present dispensation who belong to the Mediator of the new covenant, we enjoy its *spiritual* provisions now. Hebrews 10.16-17: “*I will put my laws into their hearts (regeneration), and in their minds will I write them (revelation); And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more (remission).*” A covenant formalises a relationship. Christ was introducing a relationship based on *new* terms – **grace**, not law.

“As oft as” does not mean ‘a time of your choosing’, but rather ‘every time’ or ‘on each occasion’, which occasion was the “first day of the week”. Again, the exhortation is “this *do*... in remembrance of me”, which, after the pattern of the bread, must include taking, giving thanks for, *and* drinking the cup. Some final observations should be noted:

- The emphasis is “the cup” – *singular*, not plural. One cup not only symbolises one covenant, but also the common blessings we enjoy in Christ. “*My blessings are not greater than another believer's. They may appreciate and enjoy them more than I do, but we are all equally ‘blessed with all spiritual blessings’ in Christ*” (AJ Higgins).
- The cup reminds us of what Christ took **away** – our sins (Matthew 26.28), as well as what He brought **in** – all the blessings of the new covenant. What He *brought in* is always greater than what He *took away*!
- Notice the order. He took bread *first*, and *then* the cup. The order is suggestive of the incarnation and life of Christ as the precursor to His death.
- Bread and wine are the simplest and most easily available of materials. Some men leave towering monuments or glittering memorials in their memory, but Christ left a loaf and a cup. How consistent with His inherent humility!
- The separation of the emblems is suggestive of death, the body (bread) being separated from the blood (cup).

The Announcement (v.26). “For” indicates that Paul is now explaining the memorial character of the Supper. In partaking of the Supper, *and* the accompanying verbal expression of giving thanks, “ye do shew the Lord’s death”. The word “shew” (*katangello*) means to ‘announce’ or ‘proclaim’, normally being translated ‘preach’ in the NT. The word is not used for showing *visibly*; it is an announcement *verbally*. It is not, therefore, that the breaking of the bread is in some way enacting His death. This proclamation is likely to *both* visible *and* invisible observers. The visible are those in attendance who are unsaved and “unlearned” (cf. 14.24). The invisible are *angelic* observers (cf. 11.10; 1 Peter 1.12). But His memorial is only to be commemorated *during* the time until “He come” – for then we will no longer need the symbols, we will have the Person Himself. “*The remembrance will cease when the Remembered returns.*”

Instructions for the Supper [vv.27-34] Its Commands Recorded

1. Self-Examination in view of the *Institution* of the Supper

v.27: In terms of the practical application of this teaching to the Corinthians, they were to ensure they were not partaking of the Supper “unworthily”, in an ‘unbecoming’ or ‘careless’ manner. Their behaviour *at* the Supper (vv.20-22) was unworthy of the dignity and solemnity of the occasion. The rich had behaved in a way which despised and denigrated the poor, making them feel unwelcome. The word is an *adverb* (not an *adjective*) and therefore has reference to the *manner* of observing the Supper, not their personal qualifications or fitness. Behaving in such a way declared them “guilty” of dishonouring the “body and blood” of the Lord Jesus, which the bread and cup symbolise. Treating the Supper with irreverence was to treat the Saviour with irreverence. The word “guilty” suggests they were liable to be held accountable for such sin by the governmental judgment of God (expanded in vv.29-30). They had

debased His memorial of *selflessness* into an exhibition of *selfishness*. **v.28:** To avoid such chastening from the Lord, Paul exhorts each participant to “examine himself”. Such examination involves a *continuing* personal assessment of one’s attitude and behaviour towards the Supper (including those *at* the Supper). This is a matter of self-judgment, and one the Lord Jesus taught (Matthew 5.23-26). Brethren must be reconciled before offering their worship to God. Though every believer is *positionally* worthy to partake (standing), not every believer is *conditionally* suitable (state). We thus do well to spend time in the presence of God, with a view to *confession* (if necessary) and *participation* in a worthy (fitting) manner. Such examination is with a view to participating, not staying away – “so let him eat”.

v.29: “For” explains the reasons why such examination is essential. He that partakes “unworthily” eats and drinks “damnation to (on) himself”. This is not *eternal* damnation, but a ‘sentence of judgment’ – it is God’s *governmental* and *corrective* discipline upon His own, the *chastening* of a loving Father for an erring child. So serious was the discipline that it was resulting in weakness, sickness and even death amongst the Corinthians (**v.30**). William MacDonald makes a sobering point, “A loving Father loves us too dearly to allow us to go on in sin. Thus we soon feel the shepherd’s crook on our necks pulling us back to Himself. It is possible for the saints to be fit for heaven (in Christ) but not fitted to remain on the earth in testimony.” The reason for such serious consequences is “not discerning the (Lord’s) body”. Though many manuscripts omit the word “Lord”, if it is retained, the theme of Lordship is maintained throughout the passage. They were failing to evaluate correctly (by their behaviour) the significance of the symbol of which they were partaking – the bread represented the Lord’s body given in death (as vv.24, 27). Alternatively, the lack of any reference to the blood (in addition to the body) suggests Paul could be attaching a double-meaning to the word “body”. He did the same in 10.16-17 where “body” referred to the *literal* body of Christ **and** the *spiritual* body of believers – the church. If so, their anti-social behaviour at the Supper had failed to discern, and therefore undermined, the unity and fellowship of the company (which the loaf declared). Schreiner notes, “The rich members failed to discern the unity of the body; thus, they harassed the poor and relegated them to second-class status.”

v.31: The simple remedy was for each believer, indeed the whole company, to “judge” or ‘discern for themselves’ the necessary changes in attitude and behaviour that God required. If believers had better examined themselves, their own attitudes and motives, they would not have been examined and judged in this way by the **Lord**! Such a self-examination is *thorough*, not superficial (suggested by the prefix *dia*), and *constant* (*imperfect* tense). **v.32:** And yet, the judgment imposed by the Lord was not *final* judgment, but a disciplinary “chastening”, motivated by love and calculated to produce righteousness (Hebrews 12.6, 10). This is not a *judge’s* condemnation of a criminal but a *father’s* discipline of his wayward children. The chastening hand of the Lord upon the Corinthians was proof of their genuine sonship and immunity from the future “condemnation” of the “world” at the Great White Throne.

2. Self-Sacrifice in view of the *Irregularities* at the Supper

v.33: The remedy in response to the disorder of the ‘love feast’ (vv.17-22) was to “tarry one for another”. In the context of hospitality, the verb can mean to ‘welcome’ or ‘receive’ (accept). Alternatively, it can also carry a temporal sense of ‘waiting for an event’ or arrival of a person. Paul is therefore exhorting the rich to *wait* for, and *welcome* the poor, sharing their food and *all* eating together in unity as one spiritual body. **v.34:** If v.33 deals with the Corinthians’ attitude towards one another, the *saints*, then this verse corrects their attitude to the *Supper*. They were not to mistake the Lord’s Supper for a common meal. If any saint was hungry, they should satisfy their hunger at home – the proper place for satisfying one’s appetite! Then, when they gathered, they could focus their attention on the Lord and His Supper, rather than themselves. There were other matters, “the rest”, Paul would set in order when he visited Corinth, but these matters of *headship* (vv.2-16) and *Lordship* (vv.17-34) could not wait.