

The Lord's Supper

1 Corinthians 11:20–34

To the church at Corinth



Corinth was a major Greek city and one of the most important port-cities on the Aegean Sea. It was situated at the end of a narrow strip of land, an isthmus, only about 3.8 miles wide that connected the peninsula of Peloponnese with the rest of Greece, and Corinth had two harbors, one on the east of the isthmus on the Aegean Sea and another opening to the west on the Ionian Sea. The ships would unload at either of the ports—one in Cenchrea (facing Asia) and the other in Lechaenum (facing Italy)—and move their merchandise the 4 miles overland to the other port city and avoid the dangerous sea journey around the southern end of the peninsula.





In Corinth was a temple to Aphrodite, and the Roman historian, Strabo, stated that the temple boasted a thousand prostitutes. It was a pagan city with people giving free reign to their passions and desires.

The first epistle to the Corinthian church was written by the apostle Paul during the latter part of his stay at Ephesus. For no others had he felt a deeper interest or put forth more untiring effort than for the believers in Corinth. For a year and a half he had labored among them, pointing them to a crucified and risen Saviour as the only means of salvation, and urging them to rely implicitly on the transforming power of His grace. Before accepting into church fellowship those who made a profession of Christianity, he had been careful to give them special instruction as to the privileges and duties of the Christian believer, and he had earnestly endeavored to help them to be faithful to their baptismal vows. (AA 298.1)

The members of the church at Corinth were surrounded by idolatry and sensuality of the most alluring form. While the apostle was with them, these influences had but little power over them. Paul's firm faith, his fervent prayers and earnest words of instruction, and, above all, his godly life had helped them to deny self for Christ's sake rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin. (AA 299.2)

After the departure of Paul, however, unfavorable conditions arose; tares that had been sown by the enemy appeared among the wheat, and ere long these began to bring forth their evil fruit. This was a time of severe trial to the Corinthian church. The apostle was no longer with them to quicken their zeal and aid them in their endeavors to live in harmony with God, and little by little many became careless and indifferent, and allowed natural tastes and inclinations to control them. He who had so often urged them to high ideals of purity and uprightness was no longer with them, and not a few who, at the time of their conversion, had put away their evil habits, returned to the debasing sins of heathenism. (AA 299.3)

About this time there came to Ephesus members of the household of Chloe, a Christian family of high repute in Corinth. Paul asked them regarding the condition of things, and they told him that the church was rent by divisions. The dissensions that had prevailed at the time of Apollos's visit had greatly increased. False teachers were leading the members to despise the instructions of Paul. The doctrines and ordinances of the gospel had been perverted. Pride, idolatry, and sensualism, were steadily increasing among those who had once been zealous in the Christian life. (AA 300.3)

Among the more serious of the evils that had developed among the Corinthian believers, was that of a return to many of the debasing customs of heathenism. One former convert had so far backslidden that his licentious course was a violation of even the low standard of morality held by the Gentile world. The apostle pleaded with the church to put away from among them “that wicked person.” “Know ye not,” he admonished them, “that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened.” (AA 303.2)

Another grave evil that had arisen in the church was that of brethren going to law against one another. Abundant provision had been made for the settlement of difficulties among believers. Christ Himself had given plain instruction as to how such matters were to be adjusted. "If thy brother shall trespass against thee," the Saviour had counseled, "go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. (AA 304.1)

1 Corinthians 11:17–19

1 Corinthians 1:10–13

Now in this that I declare *unto you* I praise *you* not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse. For first of all, when ye come together in the **church** [*ekklesia*, called-out ones, confessed believers, assembly, gathering, congregation], I hear that there be **divisions** [*schisma*] among you; and I partly believe it. For there must be also **heresies** [*hairesis*] among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you. (1 Corinthians 11:17–19)

- ❑ 1 Corinthians 1:10
- ❑ 1 Corinthians 3:3—different Greek word meaning dissensions or discord
- ❑ 1 Corinthians 11:18
- ❑ 1 Corinthians 12:25
- ❑ Romans 16:17

- ❑ Galatians 5:15—bite and devour
- ❑ Titus 3:10—heretick—*hairetikos*—factious [which means you divide into factions], divisive. The factious man maintains opinions that are contrary to the established gospel as preached by Paul and as set forth in the OT. If these contrary opinions are actively promoted, schism develops, and church members, both old and new, are unsettled in the faith. (*SDA BC*)
- ❑ 1 Timothy 6:3–5

For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be **divisions** [*schisma*] among you; and I partly believe it. For there must be also **heresies** [sects, opinions, dogmas] among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.
(1 Corinthians 11:18–19)

hairesis—sect, party, faction, opinion, dogma, false teaching, untrue doctrine

Acts 5:17—sect of the Sadducees, Acts 15:5—sect of the Pharisees, Acts 24:5—sect of the Nazarenes, or Acts 24:14; 28:22 believers in Jesus

But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. (2 Peter 2:1–2)

- ❑ V. 19—there must be—*dei*—it is necessary, it implies a logical necessity; Matthew 16:21—how he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things; Matthew 24:6—these things must come to pass but the end is not yet; Luke 2:49—I must be about my Father's business
- ❑ On the road to Emmaus—But we trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel: (Luke 24:21)
- ❑ Only Mark 16:12; Luke 24:13
- ❑ Vs. 25—O fools—unintelligent, mindless and without understanding and reason

- ❑ Vs. 26—ought—*dei*—it was necessary; Acts 5:29—ought to obey God rather than men; John 3:7—ye must be born again
- ❑ Vss. 37, 41—at first they were terrified and frightened, then they believed not for joy and wondered
- ❑ Vs. 44—must be—*dei*
- ❑ Luke 24:46—*dei*—behoved Christ—necessary, even logically necessary

When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not. (1 Corinthians 11:20-22)

The early Christians customarily preceded the Lord's Supper by what they called a love feast, or *agapē*. Thus the entire proceeding formed a commemoration of the last Passover feast, at which Christ instituted the ordinance of the Lord's Supper. This meal, followed by the Lord's Supper, showed that all shared in the provisions God makes for His people, both material and spiritual, and that there is no partiality manifested toward any. (*SDA BC*)

Owing to the divisions and factions that had developed within the church at Corinth, the spirit of love and brotherly fellowship that characterizes all true followers of Jesus had to some extent disappeared. This unfortunate condition was revealed at the celebration of the feast that was supposed to be the Lord's Supper, by each participant bringing his own food and eating it himself, without any thought of sharing it with others. The rich had an abundance to eat, and the poor often had nothing. The supper that had been instituted to commemorate the supreme demonstration of love thus became a mere private feast, a proceeding without meaning or significance, which each one might as well have performed at home. This brought the sacred ordinance of the Lord's Supper into disrepute. The schisms in the church were largely responsible for this state of affairs, and it is possible that members of different parties ate separately because of their pride, refusing to humble themselves by fellowship around the Lord's table. (*SDA BC*)

For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you,
That the Lord Jesus the *same* night in which he was betrayed took
bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake *it*, and said, Take,
eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in
remembrance of me. After the same manner also *he took* the cup,
when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my
blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink *it*, in remembrance of me.

(1 Corinthians 11:23-25)

Our Lord has said, "Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink His blood, ye have no life in you.... For My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed." John 6:53-55. This is true of our physical nature. To the death of Christ we owe even this earthly life. The bread we eat is the purchase of His broken body. The water we drink is bought by His spilled blood. Never one, saint or sinner, eats his daily food, but he is nourished by the body and the blood of Christ. The cross of Calvary is stamped on every loaf. It is reflected in every water spring. All this Christ has taught in appointing the emblems of His great sacrifice. The light shining from that Communion service in the upper chamber makes sacred the provisions for our daily life. The family board becomes as the table of the Lord, and every meal a sacrament. (*DA 660.3*)

And how much more are Christ's words true of our spiritual nature. He declares, "Whoso eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath eternal life." It is by receiving the life for us poured out on Calvary's cross, that we can live the life of holiness. And this life we receive by receiving His word, by doing those things which He has commanded. Thus we become one with Him. "He that eateth My flesh," He says, "and drinketh My blood, dwelleth in Me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me." John 6:54, 56, 57. To the holy Communion this scripture in a special sense applies. As faith contemplates our Lord's great sacrifice, the soul assimilates the spiritual life of Christ. That soul will receive spiritual strength from every Communion. The service forms a living connection by which the believer is bound up with Christ, and thus bound up with the Father. In a special sense it forms a connection between dependent human beings and God. (*DA* 660.4)

Though this covenant was made with Adam and renewed to Abraham, it could not be ratified until the death of Christ. It had existed by the promise of God since the first intimation of redemption had been given; it had been accepted by faith; yet when ratified by Christ, it is called a *new* covenant.

The law of God was the basis of this covenant, which was simply an arrangement for bringing men again into harmony with the divine will, placing them where they could obey God's law. (PP 370-371)

But this *shall be* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.
(Jeremiah 31:33)

A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do *them*. (Ezekiel 36:26-27)

Do this in remembrance of me.” (1 Corinthians 11:25)

Christ's example forbids exclusiveness at the Lord's Supper. It is true that open sin excludes the guilty. This the Holy Spirit plainly teaches. 1 Corinthians 5:11. But beyond this none are to pass judgment. God has not left it with men to say who shall present themselves on these occasions. For who can read the heart? Who can distinguish the tares from the wheat? "Let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup." For "whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." "He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body." 1 Corinthians 11:28, 27, 29. (*CCh* 298.4)

When believers assemble to celebrate the ordinances, there are present messengers unseen by human eyes. There may be a Judas in the company, and if so, messengers from the prince of darkness are there, for they attend all who refuse to be controlled by the Holy Spirit. Heavenly angels also are present. These unseen visitants are present on every such occasion. There may come into the company persons who are not in heart servants of truth and holiness, but who may wish to take part in the service. They should not be forbidden. There are witnesses present who were present when Jesus washed the feet of the disciples and of Judas. More than human eyes beheld the scene. (*DA* 656.2)

Christ by the Holy Spirit is there to set the seal to His own ordinance. He is there to convict and soften the heart. Not a look, not a thought of contrition, escapes His notice. For the repentant, brokenhearted one He is waiting. All things are ready for that soul's reception. He who washed the feet of Judas longs to wash every heart from the stain of sin. (*DA* 656.3)

None should exclude themselves from the Communion because some who are unworthy may be present. Every disciple is called upon to participate publicly, and thus bear witness that he accepts Christ as a personal Saviour. It is at these, His own appointments, that Christ meets His people, and energizes them by His presence.

Hearts and hands that are unworthy may even administer the ordinance, yet Christ is there to minister to His children. All who come with their faith fixed upon Him will be greatly blessed. All who neglect these seasons of divine privilege will suffer loss. Of them it may appropriately be said, "Ye are not all clean." (*DA* 656.4)

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. But let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks **without discerning the body** eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another—if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for judgment. About the other things I will give directions when I come. (1 Corinthians 11:26–34)

To the death of Christ we owe even this earthly life. The bread we eat is the purchase of His broken body. The water we drink is bought by His spilled blood. Never one, saint or sinner, eats his daily food, but he is nourished by the body and the blood of Christ. The cross of Calvary is stamped on every loaf. It is reflected in every water spring. All this Christ has taught in appointing the emblems of His great sacrifice. The light shining from that Communion service in the upper chamber makes sacred the provisions for our daily life. The family board becomes as the table of the Lord, and every meal a sacrament. (*DA 660.3*)

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup,
you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.
(1 Corinthians 11:26)

The Communion service points to Christ's second coming. It was designed to keep this hope vivid in the minds of the disciples. Whenever they met together to commemorate His death, they recounted how "He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; for this is My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom." In their tribulation they found comfort in the hope of their Lord's return. Unspeakably precious to them was the thought, "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come." 1 Corinthians 11:26. (*DA* 659.3)