

5.2 An Invitation That Reveals Our Union

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Date: 07 August 2022

Preacher: Josh Johnston

[0 : 0 0] of that. Well we're going to turn now to our Bible readings and we're in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians and 1st Corinthians chapter 11 and reading in the second half. I suppose it's appropriate today given that we are gathered around the Lord's table. Last Sunday Josh dealt supremely well if I might say with the first half of this chapter. Very helpful indeed if you weren't here and haven't listened to that do listen online go on to the podcast and listen. Very well worth it and a very pertinent message indeed in this day when people are so confused about what it means to be men and women. But we're going to read this morning from verse 17 through to the end of 1st Corinthians 11. And Paul says to the church in Corinth but in the following instructions I do not commend you because when you come together it's not for the better but for the worse.

For in the first place when you come together as a church I hear that there are divisions among you and I believe it in part for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. When you come together it's 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.

For I receive from the Lord what I also deliver to you. That the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread 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. In the same way he also took the cup after supper saying this cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this 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 of profaning the body and the blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself then and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

[2 : 3 6] For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. And that's 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's hungry let them eat at home so that when you come together it will not be for judgment.

But the other things I will give directions when I come. Amen. May God bless us his word.

Well do turn again in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 11 and follow along. Now I wonder what the first thought that springs to mind is for you when you hear the phrase dinner party.

Some people love them. Some people can't stand them. And whilst they are usually held as a means of bringing people together to celebrate a birthday or some other similar occasion the reality is that because they involve people they always have the possibility of being awkward affairs that can expose in a more pronounced way people's differences rather than what has actually brought them together.

[4 : 1 1] Last week I heard someone recounting an experience of a dinner party where they were seated at the far end of the table as far away from their much more socially slick wife as possible and he was stuck between two French women who didn't seem able to speak English or perhaps just didn't want to to him and they talked over him in French for the entire meal.

He didn't know whether to lean forward or backwards to allow them to talk past him. Sitting bored out of his mind he was wishing he was anywhere else and meanwhile at the other end of the table

his wife was engaged in much hilarity.

What an awkward experience. Well, our passage this morning centers around a gathering for a meal the Lord's Supper but that is a meal that has at its very essence a joining together that pictures and encourages and builds upon that which is common to all those who have gathered. It's a meal that makes clear and deepens the depth of the bonds that Christians share together. And it's a meal that exposes when a church isn't really a church.

In 1 Corinthians 11 Paul deals with what seems like two rather different and disconnected things. Last week we looked at the first half of the chapter at who we are as male and female and today in the second half of the chapter we'll see who we are as the people of God the church.

[5 : 42] As male and female we are two distinct and diverse wonderfully and beautifully and necessarily so but now in our passage good glorious order is about oneness unity and the ways we aren't distinct and different but rather the ways we are made the same through Christ.

And so the first thing we see in our passage is when a church isn't a church verses 17 to 22 when a church isn't a church when division and individualism marks a church then that is a church that is in danger of ceasing to be what it's meant to be.

It's possible for a church yes a church a family of those who belong to the Lord to make a mockery of God's covenant and of the Lord's supper which is the precious covenant meal.

A mockery is made of these things when a church is a church in name only. Notice what bookends this passage this passage is all about the gathering of a church verse 17 when you come together it's not for the better but for the worse.

Verse 18 when you come together as a church verse 20 when you come together and then at the end of the passage as well verse 33 when you come together verse 34 when you come together it's possible for a gathering like this that we're in now to happen in a lovely church building like this and for that gathering to be called a church and yet not be a church.

[7 : 26] This language of gathering here is so important five times Paul talks about it and then he also uses the word church twice in verse 18 and in verse 22 and that word church literally means assembly gathering the definition of a church is a gathering together of people who belong to the Lord.

It's the assembling of people who share together in the precious promises of the gospel bound together in blood the blood of their shared saviour the Lord Jesus. But look at what's happening in Corinth.

Look at the ways that Corinth wasn't being a church. Verse 17 their gathering does more harm than good. That's a staggering thing to say.

When you come together as a church it's not for the better but the worse. What is it that happens when we gather like this? God's word is opened and the voice of Jesus himself is heard.

We pray to our Father who controls and is powerful over this whole world. Hymns are sung in praise to God and to edify one another.

[8 : 41] The sacraments are administered in which we're assured truly and really that as real as the water of baptism is so real has Christ's blood washed away our sin and so really have we become part of the body of Christ.

And as real as the bread and the wine are so real has Christ crucified for us that we would be redeemed be joined to Christ and to one another forever.

And as real as the bread and the wine are so real will be the feast that we will one day share together together in glory. All these things as we gather together are proclaiming to us aloud that we as a church belong to Christ and receive all of his benefits.

And these things aren't done in vain. These are the means God has given to us to worship him truly as the gathered people of God. These are the means that God has given to us that we might be renewed.

Renewed from heaven itself from where Christ himself is. renewed as he raises us up with him so that we are seated with him in the heavenly places. These are the means given to us to put off the old man and to continue to walk in the newness of life that is now ours.

[9 : 59] But the Corinthian gathering doesn't simply lack these benefits. It's not just that it's not doing them any good at all. It's making things worse.

We'll see later on verse 30 that in fact they were actually under covenant curses for their approach to worship. But it's not for their better it's for their worse their gathering.

Well why is that the case? What was going on to cause such disaster? Well it's because their gathering was a gathering in name only. Look at verse 18. When you come together as an assembly as a church I hear that there are divisions among you. When you're together you aren't really together. And verse 19 the divisions go deeper there are factions the divisions have hardened solidified into discernible differences. And so look at the astonishing thing Paul says in verse 20. When you gather when you gather with bread and wine just like this the one thing you're most assuredly not doing is sharing in the Lord's Supper.

[11 : 12] Why? Well how could you be? Verse 21 notice how the corporate language now disappears and it's replaced by individualistic language.

In eating each one goes ahead with his own meal. one goes hungry another gets drunk. Somebody over there is tucking into a feast and another over there is sitting with a grumbling stomach. Someone is sipping another fine and fruity merlot and others decided to cook up their own sardew. Look at verse 22. What?

Do you not have your own houses to eat in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? The problem here isn't just that some in the Corinthian church were going hungry.

It wasn't that they should just all get together and share in a feast. Paul says later if you're hungry eat in your own house. The problem was that they were humiliating brothers and sisters.

[12 : 21] Not treating them as such. They were scorning and neglecting and belittling them. Making more obvious the distinctions. The distinctions of the strong and the weak. The wealthy and the poor.

Those same old Corinthian words that we've been seeing again and again. Those distinctions were being made even more prominent in the one place they mustn't be. Rather than church and indeed the Lord's Supper being a place where all are equal, all weak, all cross bearers, all in need of a saviour, all lifted up and enriched through Christ.

In Corinth, the gathering and the Lord's Supper only served to highlight the strong and the weak, the haves and the have-nots. My commentators point out here that the social divide would have been particularly pronounced around the supper because the wealthy weren't constricted by work and so would likely have started to feast together before the poor workers arrived and they shared in the Lord's Supper or not, as it were.

We see evidence of that kind of thing in verse 33 when Paul instructs them to wait. But the divide would also have been evident because the church in Corinth would likely have met in a sizable house, likely belonged to a wealthy member of the church.

And the dining room in such houses would have room for perhaps about nine people to be seated around the table. And it would only have been in that room that the full feast, the full meal would have been served.

[13 : 54] And so you can picture it, can't you? The mighty ones of Corinth assembled in the lavish dining room with all the rich fineries and flavors, all keen to be close to the host, the significant ones.

And then the rest sprawled over the rest of the house hoping for any kind of sliver of the action as the trays of food moved past. Remember that Paul has already made clear that the bulk of the Corinthian church were not special in the eyes of the world.

He said that in chapter one, didn't he? Not many of you were of noble birth, not many were wise or powerful. And so where there are such crass and compassionless behavior, it revealed a deep divide in this church.

It accentuated it, it built it up. And the divides being revealed were about more than wealth, they were about genuine faith, genuine cross shaped faith.

That's what Paul says in verse 19, isn't it? The factions reveal those who are genuine, those with a genuine faith, those with a genuine pick up your cross faith.

[15 : 07] Now in the West, we are fiercely individualistic and that adds significant challenges for us in being the church. church. It's so easy for us to approach church and our church family with the blinkers on, the blinkers that see us think about church primarily and how it affects me.

So involvement when it suits me is what I'll do. Growth groups, hard work, so it doesn't suit me anymore. No matter that it has a detrimental impact on my brothers and sisters, I'm giving it up.

Or I don't like the kinds of hymns, the music here, they're not to my taste, so I'm going to do what I can to try and change that, make it more palatable for me. Or I just don't like these young preachers, or a particular preacher, so I'll just opt out of those services without pause to consider the loss that is for the body of which we're all a part when we're opting out of family time.

A church is truly a church when it lives out the reality of what is theologically true of itself, that all who belong to Christ are members together of the same body, brothers and sisters in the same family, no superior and inferior, and we're all one, all for one another, not for ourselves.

Well, here's something we ought perhaps to think about in light of these verses. If at some point we find ourselves wearied or even frustrated by our gatherings as a church, it's worth us pausing to ponder, is this not for our better but for the worse, because we've neglected to practice love for our brothers and sisters, or worse still, are we harboring resentment for them?

[17 : 01] Is the gathering frustrating me because I'm forsaking my brothers and sisters? brothers and others. Or as John Calvin says, in the supper, we learn that we cannot love Christ without loving him in the brethren.

That's worth us pondering. Well, the second thing we see in these verses is a feast not to be forgotten, a feast not to be forgotten, verses 23 to 26.

The Lord's Supper makes plain to us the wonderful realities of the gospel, and it nourishes us through them to help us evermore to live as we are, the true people of God, joined inseparably to Jesus and to one another.

I'm sure many of us could recite the words found in these verses. There isn't a month that goes by in our church where we don't hear and respond to these words. Each new month here brings another service of communion, just like today.

But we mustn't divorce these words from their context. Why did Paul write these words right here to the Corinthians? It's because whilst they have been having meals, they may even have been having something that resembled the Lord's Supper, but that was the very meal they were forgetting.

[18 : 27] Look at the things that Paul emphasizes about the supper. first thing to notice, notice who the host is. Verse 23, Paul received a supper.

He didn't come up with it. He received it and passed it on. Notice he received it from the Lord.

Again, verse 23, Jesus took the bread.

Verse 24, Jesus broke it. Jesus said, this is my body. Do this in remembrance of me. Verse 25, Jesus took the cup.

Jesus said, it's the new covenant in my blood. Do it in remembrance of me. Verse 26, as often as this is done, it proclaims Jesus' death.

This is well and truly the Lord's Supper. It's his table. He's the one who invites. He's the one who feeds. None of us get to set the guest list or pass comment on it.

[19 : 34] We say that so regularly, don't we, as we celebrate the supper. This isn't the church's table. It doesn't belong to this church. It doesn't belong to any denomination. It's the Lord's table. And to those who truly belong to him, he invites us.

Come dine with Jesus. Come feed your souls on him. He is host, inviting us to feast with him and feast on him.

Not literally, eating his flesh and drinking his blood. We don't bring him down to us in the supper, but he really and truly brings us up to him, to his heavenly table.

And he really nourishes us. It's shocking, but look at what Jesus says. the bread is for you. As often as you do this, that is, eat it, and as often as you drink the wine, these things are for you.

And so Jesus says to eat and drink. And the bread we eat is his body, and the wine is his blood. Not physically, but spiritually.

[20 : 41] It's still bread that we eat, doesn't cease to be bread. But as we outwardly partake of these elements, we're inwardly partaking of Christ himself, the one who is the bread of life, feeds our souls.

He preaches to us, he sins to us, he confirms to us, he assures us that we have truly received blessing upon blessing from him. For we have truly received Jesus and all that he is.

When we see the wine, that preaches to us that Christ's blood really was spilt for us, to wash us.

When we smell the wine, it preaches to us that the pleasing aroma of Christ's once-for-all sacrifice has satisfied the Father.

And as we eat the bread, it confirms to us that Jesus is the bread of heaven, the bread of life that fills every spiritual hunger, that gives us everything we need.

These things tell us that Jesus, when hungered and thirsted after, will never leave us empty and unsatisfied. No one gets to curtail this feast.

[21 : 50] What an abomination to deny and undermine this real means of grace for other believers. It's Jesus' meal. We all come as guests invited. If any are VIPs, all are VIPs.

At the Lord's table, we don't have to stand aside as outsiders waiting for our turn. and we also don't get to set the menu or the place settings or the invitation list.

We're all equals at the table, not beggars trying to grab some crumbs, but equals as sons of a loving father, esteemed through the son, sharing with him and sharing in him.

But notice, as well as who hosts this party, this meal, notice too the slightly pointed nature of verse 23 and the plurality of the supper.

Look at that little phrase, on the night he was betrayed. There are various ways Paul could describe the occasion of the last supper when Jesus instituted this meal, but he chooses to lace his teaching on it here with betrayal.

[23 : 04] I think Paul is perhaps pointedly aligning the Corinthians to betrayal, betraying Jesus himself as they spoil and taint his supper that he lavishly provides for his people.

Where the Corinthians exclude or where they act in their own interests, acting individualistically, and so reinforcing divides between the mighty and the weak, they're betraying the very substance of the supper and of Jesus.

And so against such individualism, it's worth noticing too that these words are filled with plural language. The you words are plural. This is my body which is for you all.

As often as you all drink of this cup, as often as you all eat and drink, feeling to appreciate our inseparable union with each other, as well as our inseparable union with Christ, is a betrayal.

It's anti-communion. It's anti-church. But notice also that this is a covenant meal.

[24 : 22] Jesus himself uses that word, doesn't he, in verse 25, this cup is the new covenant in my blood. God. And I think it's to our great impoverishment if we boil down the Lord's supper as simply something that we do to help us remember Jesus' death.

It certainly does remind us of it and the significance of it, but it's so much more than that. Turn back to chapter 10. We saw this when we studied chapter 10 last year.

Notice the language of participation. 10 verse 16. The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ?

The bread, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? The meal means something, something profound. It does something.

Paul there in chapter 10 goes on to say that it's incongruous then to dine in an idol temple because that is joining with idols in the same way that the supper is joining with Jesus. To do so is to dine with demons.

[25 : 37] And so in the same way we really do dine with Jesus. And then also look at 10.17. Look at the oneness. One bread and we who are many are one body.

this is a covenant meal that expresses our real bonds together. It cannot possibly be only about remembering because it's a corporate activity that is to bond us more together.

As we share a 40th of the banquet of the last day. And even the language of remembrance which we see here twice. Remembrance in the context of covenant is actually about more than simply remembering something has happened.

It's a language of renewing covenant with God. It's remembering the covenant relationship and enjoying and celebrating the reality of that covenant relationship. A covenant that is with the people of God corporately.

And it's also calling on God to remember what he's promised. A way of illustration, think of the rainbow back in Genesis chapter 9.

[26 : 48] It was to the covenant with Noah what the supper is to the new covenant. And we see there that the rainbow's primary purpose was to call God to remember.

And so not to wash away ever again the earth in judgment. The remembering here is both calling on God to remember, proclaiming to him the Lord's death and all that that means for the people of God.

And also it's an opportunity for us to call to mind what it means to claim that death as ours. To claim all the blessings that come from the cup, but also to renew covenant.

To pursue the right response of faithfulness to all of God's promises and commands. And it's because it's a covenant meal that it is laced with blessings.

All the real blessings that we've seen. Blessings that flow from the table that we're invited to. But because it's a covenant meal that has blessings attached to it, it also has curses, which we'll see in verse 30.

[27 : 56] Last thing to note in these verses, verse 26, it's a meal laced with anticipation until Jesus comes. Remember, the Corinthians were an already people.

They wanted the crown but not the cross. They wanted glory now, no waiting. Well, the supper places before us and places before the world that the cross is the way.

The cross is the pattern for life. It cannot be left behind. It cannot be moved on from. And so until we see and experience in full and by sight all that the supper is a fortiest of, then what is this life all about now?

It's about the cross. cross. It's power and it's pattern. It's message and it's manner. And so lastly, Paul finishes by saying and giving us a lesson in mealtime manners.

We have a lesson in mealtime manners, verses 27 to 34. When the Lord's supper is approached by those who are humbled by grace, then it breeds comfort and joy.

[29 : 10] But when the Lord's supper is approached by those who exhibit hatred for grace, then it brings more condemnation and judgment. Look at verse 27.

Whoever therefore eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty. It's so important for us here to be clear on what Paul says.

Some traditions have so skewed how people think about the supper that there is much concern about unworthiness and taking communion. And people have been crippled in feeling like they couldn't possibly ever take communion because they're so unworthy.

But notice what Paul actually says. This isn't anything to do with being unworthy. It's about having an unworthy manner towards the supper. Of course, we're all unworthy.

But this is a supper for the weak. It's a supper for sinners. None of us have earned a place at this table. None of us can assume a place aside from God's gracious provision for us in Christ.

[30 : 18] And so however weak of faith it is, if we know we have nothing to give apart from all that Christ has done for us, then we don't need to fret about our worthiness.

For we're esteemed and elevated as we're joined to Christ. If we belong to him, if we won't let him go, no matter what people say, then he beckons us, come, this table's set for you.

Well, notice then what Paul is saying here. It's about an unworthy manner. Well, what's that? What is an unworthy manner? Well, I think it's helpful if we look at verses 26 and 27 together.

As often as you take communion, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. Whoever, therefore, takes communion in an unworthy manner will be guilty.

I take it that that word, therefore, is very important for us. I take it that an unworthy manner is a manner that rejects the cross, the Lord's death that's being proclaimed, and all of its implications.

[31 : 27] Christians. That's the thread through this whole letter. The mighty Corinthians disdain the cross, its message, but even more its manner.

It cuts against all that they love and cherish. How can one who wants to laud themselves and celebrate their own glory and might, how can they marry that with the idea of the cross of Christ? They don't fit. Corinthian spirituality says we're mighty. The cross says we need mercy, and mercy is available. Corinthian spirituality says we're wise.

The cross says we're weak. Corinthian spirituality says we're kings. The cross says we need a king who will rescue us. And there is one.

Corinthian spirituality says we are superior to other Christians. The cross says other Christians are our siblings. And so look at what Paul says rather strikingly.

[32 : 36] Approaching the supper in an unworthy manner, failing to die, failing to take hold of the way of the cross, competing with other Christians instead of cherishing them, makes one guilty concerning the body and blood of Christ.

Because we're joined to him. We've seen that in chapter 6. We've seen it in chapter 10. We're participating with him. What's done to the body is done to Christ.

And so the right approach, the right manner to come to Jesus' table is to do two things. First, Paul says to examine ourselves. And I take it that that is to come with the empty hands of faith and knew that we would be finished if it weren't for the one who said it is finished whilst hanging on the cross. The examining is coming with love for the Lord, coming in repentance to admit our weakness, our feelings, our needfulness. It's coming to say that we have nothing but what Jesus himself lavishes upon us.

So Paul says examine ourselves. But he also says discern the body, verse 29. Discern the body. I think Paul is saying that we are to discern the body that we belong to.

[33 : 55] That is the body that has Jesus as its supreme head. That was the metaphor that Paul started chapter 11 on last week. Jesus is the head. And we'll see that metaphor of the body come to full force in chapter 12.

And I take it that Paul is telling us to discern the body. Paul is telling us to recognize that this is a corporate affair. That the essence of this sacrament, the essence of this supper, is that we are in communion with Jesus and with one another.

Sharing together in the body of Christ. And so how we treat and relate with one another matters deeply. So it's a problem if we come to communion and we're troubled by someone else in the church family or we're at odds with them.

It's important that we lay that down. Repent of it. Ask for the Lord to forgive us. Ask for the Lord to help us love our brothers and sisters deeply and truly and really.

Asking these things as we share together in the supper. Perhaps some of us will need to spend some time this morning as we receive the elements later praying about how we have been treating Christ's body, treating our brothers and sisters.

[35 : 20] Well, when a church is divided, the Lord's Supper is an opportunity. An opportunity either to continue down the road that leads to being a church in name only, shunning the essence of the sacrament and shunning Jesus himself or it's an opportunity to be renewed, to throw off division and come as brothers and sisters invited and united.

Corinth had long since ceased to celebrate the supper as the supper because they were undermining its very soul. They were a church divided, when Christ died to gather them together as one.

And those consequences in Corinth were grievous. This was a church who were in covenant relationship with God. And so as they made a mockery of that covenant and of that meal, it shouldn't have been a surprise that curses would follow.

So verse 30, Paul says there is weakness or that can be translated sickness, sickness and illness and death amongst you. Those are all curses laid out in Deuteronomy for breaching covenant. But notice too why that's happened. Verse 32, Paul says it's as a discipline, it's an opportunity to not be condemned. Finally, heed it, listen to it.

[36 : 51] When we're in covenant with God, we will receive blessings and forties of all that will be ours fully one day where we receive ultimate, final blessing.

But there will also be ways that the Lord seeks to refine us. And because it's such a very serious thing for a church to feel to be a church, he will refine that.

To be a church in Neomoonly where there are a group of people but there is no love, there is no sacrifice for one another, where it's competition and rivalry that marks a people rather than love and honor.

Well, we shouldn't be surprised if there are curses that follow. Look at how Paul finishes this off. It's a simple instruction, verse 33.

When you come together to eat, he says, wait for one another. Notice Paul isn't taking aim at some being wealthy and others not. Paul's answer isn't to break down social divides across all of life.

[38 : 00] His answer is to make clear that whilst those divides can exist, they mustn't create tears in the church. He says, verse 34, if someone's hungry, eat at home, that's fine.

Have your feast, but have it at home, not in church, so that when you come together, you wait, wait to all share together in this feast for the soul.

Wait and join with brother and sister. Don't be divided. Having considered all that, it might have been tempting for the Corinthians to leave aside the supper, to forget about it altogether with all that's at stake.

But Paul's answer is, when you have it, keep having it. It's important. It's teeming full of blessing, but when you do so, wait.

It's a simple command. Wait for one another. Embrace the cross, lay down everything, come as one, come as a people joined together, as you really are, a people humbled under grace.

[39 : 08] This is the Lord's table. It's he who invites us. And that invitation reveals our union, yes, to Jesus, but also to one another. he calls us, he cleanses us, he consecrates us so that we belong to him.

And then he gives us all proof that we really do. He invites us to sit together and have a meal with him. That invitation highlights that a church is truly a church.

Let's pray. Father, we are humbled at all that you've given to us. In our humility, help us to live for and to love our brothers and sisters, the precious body of our Lord Jesus.

And so through your grace, make us a church that is ever growing in love for the brethren. and we ask this in Jesus' name.

Amen. Amen.