

# Doing Church part 2

A Taste of Immortality | 1 Corinthians 11.17-34  
June 5, 2017 – Spence Shelton

Group Exercise to start out our day. Let's see if you can identify what the following symbols represent:

1. Peace
2. Wi-Fi
3. Olympics
4. Snapchat

Ok now I don't want you to do this next one out loud but I want you to think about what emotions these next few symbols bring up in you:

1. Nazi
2. GOP & Dem Symbols
3. Loading Icon
4. Panthers Icon
5. Krispy Kreme Hot-n-Now sign

These symbols, like all symbols, are a windows into the thing they represent. That's why we have emotional reactions to images that are just images. And the weightier the thing represented, the more intense our emotional reaction to its symbol.

Today we are looking into one of the most sacred symbols in church life: Communion. And if you grew up around church maybe it was called communion, or maybe the Eucharist, or the Lord's Supper. It's been called many things because it has been an important part of every church no matter whether its

catholic or Baptist or Presbyterian or Lutheran or non denominational... And listen there are very few things that all Christian churches have in common. Like....we all believe Jesus is good... and that seems to be about it.

But this meal has stood the test of time. It has outlasted empires & kingdoms and as long as there is a church, this symbol will stand. Yes different streams of Christianity have believed different things about it, but the meal has remained. And the reason this symbol has lasted so long is because Christ said this meal was how we were to remember him. He didn't give us a reading or a list of doctrines or even a song. He gave us a meal to eat together.

And what we are going to see is that it lasted because it was never just a meal. It was to be nourishment to the souls of the saints. Like fresh water in the desert, this meal was given to the church to nourish believers as it set their hearts back on Christ's grace. This is my hope for us today. That your soul is refreshed & nourished. Some of you are walking in a dry desert of the soul. Some of you have been walking there for years. Today you are going to finally find water. True, living water. I'm praying God uses this meal to break-through the wall in your heart, to fill your empty tank. That's what its for. So we are going to eat this meal together today. If you are new with us, we just take the bible and walk through it, passage by passage. We do it for several reasons and one of those is to model for you how you can read your bible on your own. I think the number one most significant action anyone can do for their own spiritual growth is to spend time in the bible every day. Hopefully as we preach we model how to do that.

Anyway, take out your bible to 1 Corinthians Chapter 11. Lets start at verse 17 we are going through the end of the chapter. This breaks down into 3 segments. I'm going to take them one at a time and show you what Paul is saying. Then, we'll circle back around to show you how this meal is food for both the body and the soul.

### **The people you take communion with (17-24)**

<sup>17</sup> But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse.

He commended them at the start of chapter 11 for how they were obeying some of his instructions on gender roles, but here he says whatever they've done wrong is so bad...it would be better if they just canceled church. Because whatever they are doing is so off, its actually leaving people worse off in their faith than better. Let that sober us as we hear what he says

<sup>18</sup> 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, <sup>19</sup> for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized.

We saw at the beginning of this letter that Pauls' purpose was to fight against disunity

1.10 – I appeal to you brothers that there be no divisions among you. Reconciling division is the whole purpose of the letter

And now the sad irony he sees is that when “come together” they aren't “together.” They aren't one body but instead there are divisions. And there were divisions because some

thought they had God's special approval and were of more value than the others. That's what some were saying. And Paul is showing them how messed up that is. So he says:

<sup>20</sup> When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. <sup>21</sup> For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. <sup>22</sup> 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.

Ok here's the deal: This church had people of different socio-economic statuses who were holding down different jobs. Some of the wealthier people in the church had flexible schedules and were arriving at the worship gathering before those who were lower class that had to work longer hours. When these wealthy believers arrived, they went ahead and prepared the communion meal...then went ahead and started eating it! By the time their poorer brothers and sisters got to the worship gathering, there was no communion left for them. And that was humiliating to these poor believers. They came to the worship gathering and their wealthier brothers and sisters were drunk & had full bellies...eaten all the communion meal. And they who ALREADY struggled to get meals every day, were now without food but more importantly couldn't participate in this sacred meal Christ had given the church. This was really selfish on the part of the wealthy for multiple reasons. Paul is saying one of the purposes of this meal was to exalt the unity we have as the family of Christ. One tenet core to the Christian faith is that we are all created equal & we are all viewed equally in value by God the father.

- We all got here the same way: nobody is smarter or better or more righteous when it comes to salvation. We all have the same access to God because we all came through the same faith in the saving blood of Jesus.
- We all walk with the same spirit. There are no “special” Christians. We are one BODY. His body. When 1<sup>st</sup> century Christians ate the meal they broke one loaf of bread to represent that. And they ate it at the same time. That’s why we eat it at the same time.
- So Paul says listen these divisions in the church don’t square with this meal  
Some Corinthians felt too smart or too good for the others...and some felt too dumb, too poor, or too guilty to be with the others. The problem was the same in both: they weren’t seeing themselves as in “Christ” but seeing themselves as in themselves. It was my standing compared to your standing instead of my standing in Christ is the same as your standing in Christ.
- Paul says hey, this is off! And that disunity was so offensive Paul says...I don’t know what you are eating but it isn’t the Lord’s Supper (Chapter 1:13...Is Christ Divided?). You are not in Christ right now, you are in YOU In fact, I wish you wouldn’t even gather together because this is SUCH a misrepresentation of the gospel, it is doing more harm than good.

there is a tendency by some to feel slightly superior to others because you haven’t made the mistakes others have. You haven’t been divorce, never had an abortion, or an addiction, or an affair, you know done those bad things God doesn’t like.

And then those of you with some bad mistakes play along because you feel like you are judged when you come to church...You are on pins and needles thinking “man if they found this out...”

If you think of why you are accepted by God or not accepted by God, and you name something about yourself, you can’t partake of this meal because you are not *in Christ*, you are still *in you*. You can’t sing “Amazing Grace” because it’s not about amazing grace its about amazing YOU.

Ok So Paul resets the way they are to think about the people they are taking this symbol with. Then he tells them what it is supposed to be. And here is where you gotta REALLY lock in:

#### **What Communion is About**

<sup>23</sup> For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, <sup>24</sup> 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.” <sup>25</sup> In the same way also he 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.”

This is to be a regular part of the worship of the church when it comes together. We are to take bread and break it apart. And that broken bread is to symbolize the body of Jesus himself. And as he handed it to his disciples he told them his body was being given for them. Jesus was figuratively GIVING his life to them before he LITERALLY gave his life to them. And so when we eat the bread...that’s the symbol...it is supposed to nourish our souls just like bread nourishes the body. Are

you starving spiritually? Come to the Lord's table...to the feast. Take your heart and mind back to the indescribable love of Christ for you.

Jesus took a cup of wine and poured it for them. And said this is the new covenant in my blood. Now catch this...Christ's blood has created a new covenant between this church and God. It has, and this is crucial for Paul, bound them TOGETHER, under a new relationship with God. The old covenant was that they had to follow certain laws in order to be in right fellowship with God and they had to sacrifice animals so that the animal blood could pay for their sins. But Christ is saying no, MY BLOOD is the sacrifice for your sins and Hebrews says this sacrifice is ONCE for all. So now, everyone who is a Christian is bound together in this INCREDIBLE promise that Jesus has set us free from the penalty of our sins! We are free...TOGETHER...in Christ!

**<sup>26</sup> For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.**

When we do this...and we should do it often...we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. That little phrase is logically ridiculous when left on its own right? We proclaim the death of someone until that someone comes? You see what Paul is infusing into the purpose of communion? Together everyone in here becomes a preacher! And preaches the very central message of Christianity. You must be saved because you are guilty of sin. I know saved is a Christian-y word but that's just the reality of it. You have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. You don't need to be improved or enlightened or renewed or enhanced. "Hey

man what happened you are different" ...I got enhanced. No. I don't need education I don't need moral reform. I NEED TO BE SAVED!

That's why I don't eat this meal on behalf of everyone. We all eat it. Because each of us as we chew that bread & drink that wine we are saying I destroyed Christ. It was my sin that cause his body to go on that cross. And he did it to save me!

Why put this here? He's hitting the reset button for the Corinthians. Listen: they'd kept the religious practice but forgotten the meaning. So it had become an empty ritual and from there they distorted the whole thing. And what was supposed to be a means of grace had become harmful to the church.

This meal, Paul says hey this is HOLY! And when you take it, Paul said in the last chapter you PARTICIPATE in Christ's body & blood when you take it. Chapter 10.16 -

**[16] The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?**

Something Really, Really important is happening in this meal. Now I'll pause right here to say yes, different traditions have believed different things about how Jesus is present in this meal. And its all in the word "participation." What is important to know is that the word here is the word for "fellowship."

We fellowship with Christ through this meal. Some traditions think the bread and wine change into Christ's body when you take it. Called transubstantiation traditionally catholic view.

But first, Jesus said was present with them when he instituted it so he didn't literally hand out pieces of himself. Second, it seems to ignore the symbolism he says. Other end of the spectrum is that it is purely symbolic (traditional protestant view). That seems to downplay the fellowship we are supposed to experience with Christ through the meal. G.B. Caird said "Like a kiss or a handshake, they are a means of conveying what they represent." There is clearly more to the meal than just reminding us of what Christ did for us.

Think of it this way...my little girls are 5 & 3 and they love to dance with dad. Now, they always know I love them right? But when we dance and I pick them up and spin them around and then hug them & kiss them on the cheek, they experience my love. I don't love them more in that moment, they are just drawn in to it and they fellowship with me in that moment.

This is what the Holy Spirit does with us and Christ in communion. Michael Bird says, that the Holy Spirit (who we believe to be God's presence living with believers) draws Christ downward and the believer upward to meet Christ in the gospel meal." In other words, somehow Christ has to be present for us to participate with him. This view that the symbol actually does something...it isn't just representative, it is effective to our faith...makes this meal uniquely holy in the life of the believer.

### **What happens when we don't treat it right**

Ok warning...Paul is about to get nasty...<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This commentary on worthiness comes from J.D. Greear's sermon on

<sup>27</sup> Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning (other translations read "of sinning against") the body and blood of the Lord. <sup>28</sup> Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. <sup>29</sup> For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. <sup>30</sup> That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. <sup>31</sup> But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. <sup>32</sup> But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

I know some of you have eyebrows raised right now. did he really just claim people were struck down by God because they disrespected communion? Yes. He. Did. And this teaching is consistent with the bible's teaching on divine judgment elsewhere in scripture.<sup>2</sup> You want to talk about unpopular topics...this is a big one. I don't know how else to say it but God is HOLY. And he will not be mocked. Especially by his own people and ESPECIALLY when they are supposedly worshipping him. Acts 5 – A married couple named Ananias & Saphira tell everybody that they are selling their property and bringing the money from that sale to the church. But, while they say they are giving the whole amount, in reality they are only giving part of it. So they walk in to church and tell a bold

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<sup>2</sup> It should not be assumed that the sick or dying were particularly guilty of the sin, but, like most plagues of divine judgment in the Old Testament, the plague could fall indiscriminately on the community as a whole (e.g., Exod. 32:35; Num. 8:19; 11:33; Deut. 32:24; Josh. 22:17). Ciampa, R. E., & Rosner, B. S. (2010). *The First Letter to the Corinthians* (p. 556). Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

face lie right to Peter's face "Here is all of it." And God strikes them dead on the spot!

You say, "I thought the OT God was wrathful and NT God was loving." No. God is the same always and he is Holy in both testaments and he is Holy today.

Ok, now that you are all sufficiently freaked out...Some of you are like "I AM NEVER TAKING COMMUNION AGAIN!" Who is WORTHY?

Ok verse 27 that word "unworthy" is an adverb not an adjective. Which makes a difference. We are always "unworthy" because we are sinners but we can eat this meal "unworthily" when we are not living in submission to Christ. Basically we eat unworthily when we fail to acknowledge we are unworthy. But we eat worthily when we acknowledge our unworthiness. Eating unworthily has nothing to do with *being* unworthy, because of course you are, it has do to with your failure to acknowledge it.

If you come this morning to this meal and you know that you are a repentant sinner saying you have no hope for the grace of God based on yourself...then this meal becomes healing for you. But if you are too proud and think you ARE worthy, that is to take it unworthily. To know you are unworthy but confident in Christ's power to heal. That's to take it in a worthy manner.

This is Jesus with the woman who has the defilement of blood. When a Muslim reads that story & sees her touch Jesus and Jesus say "WHO TOUCHED ME?" The Muslim expects Jesus to blow her away in his wrath. Because when unclean touches clean it defiles the clean thing right? Instead...Jesus heals her.

Rather than the unclean thing defiling the clean thing, the clean thing heals the unclean thing. That's the gospel. The repentant person who knows she is unworthy finds life and healing from Christ. His blood brings life! That's what is pictured here in this meal!

That's what Paul is talking about with the judging ourselves comment. Paul isn't saying only perfect people can take communion. He's saying only repentant people can take communion. Is that you?

This is why every time we take communion you hear us begin by saying this meal is only for people who are professing Christians. We don't say that because we want to exclude you. We say that because we want to protect you. To eat & drink at this meal is your way of proclaiming Jesus' death for your sins. If you don't believe he died for your sins, and if you haven't surrendered your life to him...don't eat this meal! That would be hypocrisy and would put you squarely under the judgment of the Lord. And if you say "well I've never died before when I ate this meal even though I don't really believe all this." Listen, that's God's mercy. Don't presume on that.

St. John Chrysostom said this is how this meal distinguishes itself as sacred and different from every other meal and really every other practice of the church. He said the "offender" in Paul's eyes is one who is not bearing in mind, as he ought, the greatness of the things set before him.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Morris, L. (1985). *1 Corinthians: an introduction and commentary* (Vol. 7, p. 160). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

Do you see how powerful and important this symbol is!? It is a window and even a bridge for you to go into the very heart of God!

Ok, now that we've walked through it and gotten our heads around it, let me talk for a minute how this meal benefits you. I said at the beginning I really do believe today should be a breakthrough for some of you. The meal is supposed to be food not just to your body, but much more importantly it is food to your soul. Let me talk about how. **How communion nourishes my soul**

**Communion draws me to Christ's love for me** – For Christians, the fact that you are able to come to this table...even more so that Jesus *invites* you to this table...this is a vivid reminder and reassurance that Jesus loves you personally. And that love is the answer to every problem in life. Are you feeling lonely? Jesus says come to the table. I will never, ever leave you. I'm with you to the very ends of the age. Are you feeling ignored or overlooked at home or at work or with friends? Jesus says I see you, I know every hair on your head, you are the joy that made the cross worth it. Come to the table. Are you angry? Jesus says my love is so satisfying, so healing, you will finally be able to release that pain & forgive. Come to the table and feast on that love for a while. Are you hiding your sin? Jesus knows. There is no hiding who you are at the table. Repent of your sins and find forgiveness that will free you. It is a table for repentant sinners. At the table Jesus says you are Loved! You Are Healed! You are forgiven! I love you so much I gave my life for you! Jesus, the only one whose love for you matters, he loves you!

Listen I think about some of you who are in real suffering right

now. And there is a danger that you feel like God has abandoned you. And the function of this meal is to say...NO! You don't judge God's love for you on your circumstances. You judge his love for you on the CROSS! When he died for you! That's the love of Christ! Come to the table and feast on the love of Christ for you!!

The body and bread of Christ...feeding on that is saying I am joining with Christ. I am going to receive Christ as my Savior. I'm going to choose him. Much the same way we do in baptism. We join with Christ by symbolically being buried under the water and then rising again.

My soul will find its life...its meaning, purpose, and hope...in him. I believe without him I am dead in my sins but *with* him I have eternal life. And not only that...he abides in me. He walks with me! Our God is not some distant being, he is close. He says he is present with us, walking with us each day giving us the fruit of his Holy Spirit: love, Joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, self-control.

**Communion gives me unshakeable hope** - Remember I told you we'd come back to that little phrase in verse 26:

**"...For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."**

The entire hope of the church, like I said, is summed up in this phrase. Our hope has 2 dimensions to it. The first is in the Lord's death. I was hopeless because as Romans 6.23 tells me the wages of my sin is death. That means my sin, where I've chosen my way over God's way, the penalty is death. I'm hopeless there! I can't save myself. How could I do enough good to outweigh sin against an infinitely perfect being? And

nobody else can help me either because everyone is a sinner. That's a part of our nature. Which means you can't die for me because your death is payment for your sins. Yet the only possible escape from my sin would be a fellow human dying in my place. But that human would need to be human yet without my sin nature and instead have the nature of God to ensure he was PERFECTLY righteous. Only someone fully god and fully man could pay for my sin & set me free. And even if such a person existed, to top it all off, they'd have to want to do that with their life. Enter Jesus. Fully Man, Fully God. Who God the Father sent to settle my sin debt. God the son, fully man and fully god, died for me. And communion proclaims: THANKS BE TO GOD I AM FREE FROM MY SIN!

But at the same time I look and say, "Until he comes." Which is the second dimension of our hope: The resurrection, ascension, & eventual return of Jesus. Jesus didn't merely die for our sin. His resurrection declared victory over death!! He DEFEATED DEATH ITSELF! He rose, he ascended and according to scripture he sits at the right hand of God the Father. And one day he says he is coming back for all of us and will reign over all of creation! John 14.3 - John 14:3

[3] And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.

And he will come and get us.

Acts 1.11 (see if you can get this to appear after John 14.3 but on same slide. Wait for me to bring it up)

[11] and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

And when he brings us to heaven he says he is bringing us to...get this...a table. To a feast.

Matthew 8:11

[11] I tell you, many will come from east and west and recline at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven,

Revelation is going to tell us there isn't just worship around the throne, there is some kind of a victory banquet. An eternal celebration where we worship the king, feasting and resting in the presence of God himself. See the Christian has hope because IN THE END – Jesus wins! And when he wins what awaits us is eternity ALIVE worshipping with him. One theologian I read said that in light of this great victory, communion together should be the hors d'oeuvres of the coming messianic feast. Sometimes we only think about Jesus' death in this. In our tone and everything. But WE MUST CELEBRATE AND REJOICE! The early church used to say to one another as they ate this meal "maybe next time in heaven." That's why Calvin called communion the taste of immortality. Because it opens a window to eternity. The heart of the Christian is always looking in two directions, thanksgiving for the cross and anticipation of the coming of Christ. For both of those reasons Communion is the JOYFUL FEAST OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD! Which brings me to the last way we'll talk about today that communion nourishes your soul:

Communion unites me with others

The bread and the cup weren't given for me, they were given for US to US. That's what Paul was talking about in Chapter 10. 1 Corinthians 10:17

[17] Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

See a lot of times when we gather one person preaches a message to everyone. But in communion, everyone who claims to follow Jesus preaches their message to everyone else in the room. Truthfully that's one thing I don't like about having multiple services. I wish we could all see each other. Because every Christian is a story of God's miraculous power and grace. We use the language "family" a lot because that's what scripture calls us. Not only is Jesus with you, but you are a part of a family. So when you take the cup you are saying...I'm putting all my eggs in Jesus' basket. I've surrendered my whole life to him. Culture tells me I'm crazy, people at work think I'm crazy, I've even got some family members who think I'm crazy...and then you look to your left and someone says HEY ME TOO! LOOK TO YOUR RIGHT...YEP ME TOO!

I don't know about ya'll but that is really encouraging to me. As a young church we still have to grow into our relationships. I know that. But wow what a family to be a part of. As 1 Peter says once you were not a people, but now you are a people...mercy.

Closing

We are going to take this meal together now. So let me give you a chance to reflect. To judge yourself.