

Series on First Corinthians
By Doug Hamilton

1 Corinthians 11:17-34 The Big Point of Unification

1 Corinthians 11:17-19 Assembled Division

But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse. ¹⁸ For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part I believe it. ¹⁹ For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you.

- The Corinthian church was filled with division in many ways. This was something that threatened any mission work of that day and even in the church today. They simply were not working together for the common good of Christ.

1 Corinthians 11:20-22 The Perversion of the Communion

Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper, ²¹ for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk. ²² What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you.

- Their divisiveness in the church was never more apparent than in their lack of reverence for the communion of worship.
 - There were some in the church that turned it into a meal of gluttons and drunkards.
 - They would show up early and treat it as a breakfast, often not waiting for the rest of the assembly, but "wolfing down" the bread and the wine (see also 11:33-34).
 - Some were even bringing in their own food in like the pagan banquets to get their fill of wine.
 - It was their opportunity to eat, drink and be merry (Luke 12:19) by seeking first to satisfy their own appetites and thirsts.
- To this Paul said GO HOME and eat your meals, for this is something different in nature. They simply were not treating the communion with the reverence that it deserved. There is something about this thing called the communion that must be held in high regard.

Frederick the Great

On one occasion Frederick the Great invited some notable people to his royal table, including his top-ranking generals. One of them by the name of Hans von Zieten declined the invitation because he wanted to partake of communion at his church. Sometime later at another banquet Frederick and his guests mocked the general for his religious scruples and made jokes about the Lord's supper. In great peril of his life, the officer stood to his feet and said respectfully to the monarch, "My lord, there is a greater King than you, a King to whom I have sworn allegiance even unto death. I am a Christian man, and I cannot sit quietly as the Lord's name is dishonored, His character belittled, and His cause subjected to ridicule. With your permission I shall withdraw." The other generals trembled in silence, knowing that von Zieten might be killed. But to their surprise, Frederick grasped the hand of this courageous man, asked his forgiveness, and

Series on First Corinthians

By Doug Hamilton

requested that he remain. He promised that he would never again allow such a travesty to be made of sacred things.

-Our Daily Bread

Why is the Lord's Supper called communion?

- First because Paul actually uses this word to describe it in *1 Corinthians 10:16* *The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?*
- Merriam Webster's defines it as: *a Christian sacrament in which consecrated bread and wine are consumed as memorials of Christ's death or as symbols for the realization of a spiritual union between Christ and communicant or as the body and blood of Christ.*
- It is called the communion because we are partaking in SHARING Christ in a special way as a church family. It is the exact opposite of division that existed at the beginning of this section. Communal means to share and division means to be selfish. The mindset that we have when partaking in the Lord's Supper is key in making sure that we as a church are sharing Christ in the proper way.

How Does the Communion Unite the Church?

1) We communally share in the REMEMBRANCE of His Sacrifice.

1 Corinthians 11:23-25 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 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." 25 In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

- It was the night of the last Passover of the earthly ministry of Christ. This was one of the most high holy days to the Jew, for it commemorated the departure from their bondage from Egypt (see Exodus 12). From that time forward, the Jews were to celebrate this date by consuming a roasted lamb with bitter herbs, wine and unleavened bread.
- Jesus had likely participated at least 30 times in His life, for it was the practiced tradition of His people and family. *Luke 2:41* *Now His parents went to Jerusalem every year at the Feast of the Passover.* There are four Passovers that the Bible mentions specifically concerning this.

A Communion Commemoration

- The Lamb: This was prophetic of Christ Himself, for He was the Lamb of God Whom takes away the sins of the world (John 1:29). The Lamb was fully consumed, without a bone broken and in complete protection from the wrath of the Father. Jesus gave His all, He would die the expedited death on the cross and it was for the sheltering of God's people from the judgment of the Father. Christ was that Lamb.
- The Bread: This was, as Jesus said, was represented His body being broken on the cross. Partaking in this is symbolic of how the Lamb was broken completely.
- The Cup: This was symbolic of the blood that Jesus would shed for us for the remission of sins. Without the shedding of blood there could be no remission of sins (Hebrews 9:22) and Jesus was the sacrifice once in for all and for all mankind (Matthew 26:28).
 - There were four cups of the Passover of the traditional feast.

Series on First Corinthians

By Doug Hamilton

1. The first cup of wine was consumed near the doorway of the house during the preparation of the Lamb. The participants were to smear the blood of the lamb on the two doorposts (Exodus 12:7).
 2. The second cup of wine was consumed at the beginning of the meal to commemorate the reason for the meal, the beginning of deliverance of the people of God from enslavement of Egypt. This second cup is mentioned in *Luke 22:17* *And when He had taken a cup {and} given thanks, He said, "Take this and share it among yourselves;*
 3. This cup of wine was to be taken after the completion of the consuming of the meal, focusing further on the salvation from the Lord, not necessarily from bondage, but JUDGMENT. They would all drink of this cup in recognition of the "passing over" of judgment of death of the first-born. This was the second cup mentioned not by Matthew or Mark, but by *Luke in 22:20* *And in the same way {He took} the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood. During the inauguration of the Lord's Supper, particularly in this cup, Jesus informs the disciples that His blood is the atoning factor, not the passing over of the judgment of God.*
 4. The fourth cup of the Passover was to be taken by the group at the conclusion of the meal. It was called the "Cup of God's Presence" and focused on gathering the people into one unit. Following Cup #3, Matthew and Mark both similarly state *Mark 14:25-26* *"Truly I say to you, I shall never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God." 26 And after singing a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. It appears that Jesus deferred the fourth cup until we would be partaking of it in the kingdom of our Lord in His Passover called the communion.*
- When we partake of the communion, we are to remember back to the sacrifice that Jesus made on the cross, the atonement that he made for us with His blood as the perfect Lamb of God. *Isaiah 53:7* *He was oppressed and He was afflicted, Yet He did not open His mouth; Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, And like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, So He did not open His mouth.*

2) We communally share in the PROCLAMATION of His return.

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

- When we are partaking of the communion, we are sharing in the message that Jesus is coming back for us someday in the future. On the first day of the week there might be one preacher proclaiming a sermon, but when we are partaking of the Lord's Supper as a group, we are all preachers proclaiming that our hope is in Christ. *1 Peter 2:9* *"But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession..."*

Series on First Corinthians

By Doug Hamilton

3) We communally share in REFLECTION on our lifestyle.

1 Corinthians 11:27-28 Therefore whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, shall be guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord. 28 But a man must examine himself, and in so doing he is to eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

- We partake of the communion of Christ, it is with the understanding that we communally agree to examine our own personal lifestyles. We were saved by grace through faith in Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9) and not expected to continual the sinful walk of our past life prior to conversion (Ephesians 2:10). If there was ever a time to do so, it is at the Lord's Supper. If there are areas of improvement, we must make sure to make those commitments to live Godly for the rest of the week. What better way to start our week of than committing to live a full and complete life for Jesus until we meet yet again as a church family?

4) We communally share in CONDEMNATION of ungodliness.

1 Corinthians 11:29-32 For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not judge the body rightly. 30 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. 31 But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. 32 But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world.

- Peter writes in *1 Peter 4:17 For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?* If we are unwillingness a church to share the common belief that God will judge the willing sinner among the people of Christ, then we are quite pitiful and scripturally dishonest.
- Sadly there is the attitude in the church today as well as yesteryear that the all forgiving God is willing to tolerate a little leaven in the lump we call our lives. The news is that He is not. When we are partaking of the communion, it sends the message that we know the outcome of those that are not with the program. *Hebrews 10:26 For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins,*

A Loving Example

One Sunday morning in 1865, a black man entered a fashionable church in Richmond, Virginia. When Communion was served, he walked down the aisle and knelt at the altar. A rustle of resentment swept the congregation. How dare he! After all, believers in that church used the common cup.

Suddenly a distinguished layman stood up, stepped forward to the altar, and knelt beside the black man. With Robert E. Lee setting the example, the rest of the congregation soon followed his lead.

-Moody Bible Institute's Today in the Word, September, 1991, p. 15