

Jason Upchurch - 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 - The Lord's Table Manners - Part 1

When I first became a Christian at 14, I really had very little exposure to Christianity or church before that time. And once I was a Christian I didn't really church shop at all - I can't actually remember a time visiting any other churches on a Sunday morning throughout high school. So my only exposure to church was a seeker sensitive, fundamentalist baptist church. My friends were all at my church and I just figured what we did was basically what everyone else did.

I really had no idea that other churches might have a different order of service on Sunday morning. The order in which we do things on Sunday morning - pray, preach, sing, so on - is called a liturgy. Different churches have different liturgies. I didn't even know that there were differences.

I didn't know other churches did anything differently. I didn't know that there were other songs to sing, I didn't know what expositional preaching was, I didn't know that some churches took the Lord's Supper every week and I thought every church had a meet and greet time.

There's a lot we do in our gathering that, if we're honest, we just take for granted. We don't explain every aspect of the service or explain the order of the service - that would take a long time.

My friend Miles at Redemption Church downtown once did a sermon series called "Why We Do What We Do" where he went through each of the elements of their Sunday morning service - prayer, preaching, singing, announcements - and explained from the Bible why they do what they do. And why they do it in that order. It's not a bad idea.

But I think that of all the elements of the Sunday morning gathering, the Lord's Supper is probably the one thing we know the most about. Because although we touch on different themes as we take the Lord's Supper, I think most of you could probably give a pretty straightforward explanation for what the Supper is all about.

And that's a good thing! Because really at the heart of the Lord's Supper is the a visual representation of the gospel we profess. And it's a meal where we partake spiritually with the Lord who saved us. And in all of it we are encouraged and refreshed in the grace fo God.

This section here is really the longest treatment on the Lord's Supper in the Bible. It encompasses a theology of the Lord's Supper - why we do what we do. And through this section Paul also tells us how to do the Lord's Supper - and how not to do the Lord's Supper.

And that's what we're going to see first as we take a deep dive into the Lord's Supper over the next couple of weeks.

1) Problems at the Lord's Table **Read 17-22**

The Corinthians were a mess in a lot of ways, and one of the ways was how they attempted to take the Lord's Supper.

Paul says in **Vs. 17**: I do not commend you. Remember back in **Vs. 2** Paul actually commended the Corinthians on proper use of head coverings. That they were doing well on. The Lord's Supper? A train wreck.

Now, historically, something we need to understand is that when the church gathered together, many times they would share a meal with each other called a love feast. It was usually after the service. And included in the love feast was the Lord's Supper. So the early church often combined the observance of the Lord's Supper with a family meal - something like our potluck.

We need to understand that in order for this section to make sense. This love feast was common enough that the biblical writers make mention of it in a couple places.

Jude 12 says that false teachers are present at the church's love feasts. Jude says they're there like hidden reefs in the ocean. When you're sailing on the open ocean one of the biggest dangers is that you'll run aground

on a reef or massive rocks that are just below the surface of the water. You think the water is deep, you think the way is clear until you slam into a reef at full speed and it sinks your ship.

Jude says that's what false teachers are. We need to be on guard for false teachers as much now as they were then. With false teachers everything looks fine, they're nice, they're enjoyable to be around until you're eating potato salad at potluck when all of a sudden you realize how treacherous these people are.

You guys realize that false teachers don't look like the Hunchback of Norte Dame, right? They don't look like the villains in Disney movies. False teachers are kind and well studied. They're often great communicators and seem to be very loving. And yet, they are full of sin, and full of falsehood.

Jude says they'll sit right next to you at the love feast - right before taking the Lord's Supper with you - talking and joking and carrying on. And what they're doing is drawing us in for the slaughter.

Interestingly, the other place feasting is mentioned is in the exact same context. The apostle Peter talks about false teachers feasting with believers in **2 Pet 2:13** and it's likely the same idea. False teachers can secretly gather with us at these meals.

Here's why that's important to note: the love feast - and the Lord's Supper that went with it - was a very tight knit, intimate time. It's when the church recognized it's need for physical food, but also it's need for spiritual food. And they feasted on bread and wine, and they feasted spiritually on the bread of life and the cup of the New Covenant.

It was a beautiful time each week in the life of the church. And the Corinthians had absolutely destroyed that beautiful time together.

Here was some of the corruption going on. **Read 18-19**

There were divisions. No surprise there, really. The first 4 chapters of **1 Corinthians** dealt with divisions in the church. Back there, the divisions were about who was their favorite pastor.

Here, it appears the divisions are on several levels. In one sense, it appears that there are divisions between the mature Christians and the immature. Or maybe even between believers and unbelievers who were hanging out around the church because he says that he believes there must be some kind of divisions go on because one are genuine - genuine believers - and some are not.

But it also appears that there are divisions between the poor and the rich. The difference in classes in Roman society were much more stark than they are today. In the same church you could have Roman proconsuls - basically senators - and families in slavery. You could have land owners and people trying to earn their freedom. The wealth differential was massive.

And so at a love feast, it was usually those who were well off that would bring the food for the church. They basically catered. The problem was that they often decided to indulge on what they brought. And they turned the love feast into something more like a Roman kegger rather than a solemn act of worship to the living Christ who died for our sins. **Read 20-22**

So they get together and eat and it appears that they view this as a free for all. You've got people who show up and are gorging themselves on food, while at the same time some people aren't even getting anything to eat.

And we know there was wine at the Lord's Supper because apparently there was enough being passed around for some people to get drunk.

I mean, sometimes I wonder if our little thimbles full of wine are really adequate for the Lord's Supper. We get a small taste, but these guys we're passing the wine skins around and it looked more like some kind of frat party rather than the Lord's Supper.

Paul says it's such a mess - so unrecognizable - it's not even really the Lord's Supper they're celebrating. You couldn't in good conscience even call it that. It was utterly unrecognizable. Paul says in **Vs.17** that when they get together it's for the worse. It's so bad it would be better if they didn't even meet together for this.

Now, here's the deal: when we are taking part in the sacraments - baptism and the Lord's Supper - these are physical symbols with spiritual implications. And our goal is try to be as close to the original happened as possible. Because the further you get away from the original picture, the less we or anyone understands what the purpose is.

When we do the Lord's Supper, we try to replicate the original pattern as much as possible. We use wine because that's the pattern we see. We use **un**leavened bread because it represents the pure, sinlessness of Jesus. Interestingly, the bread that we use would look a lot like the original unleavened bread. The bread would be pierced through and striped for cooking purposes.

But there's a theological connection as well: Jesus was pierced for our transgressions and by his stripes we are healed. We all eat from the one loaf, the bread of life. These aren't just coincidence - God has orchestrated that we see these and experience these things.

And the closer we stick to them the more we're reminded of the truths that encourage our hearts.

There are ways to be so far away from the pattern of the Lord's Supper that it's utterly unrecognizable.

Have you ever had a little kid draw you a picture and you look and you really have no idea what the picture is supposed to be. And you ask them, "Honey, what is it?" And they proceed to describe the scene for you and, if you're honest, you would have never guessed in a million years that this was what they were trying to draw.

Now, I'm not picking on little kids. They're learning to draw. But you get the idea that sometimes what is represented is a far, far cry from what the reality is.

Well, that can be true in the Lord's Supper. The Corinthians had so polluted the Lord's Supper with sin that it was utterly unrecognizable. There was gluttony, drunkenness, selfishness.

By their actions they were despising the church of God, the people of God. They were humiliating one another, especially those who were poor in their congregation - according to **Vs. 22** who had nothing.

And Paul repeats his disappointment at the end of **Vs. 22**. There is no commending the Corinthians for anything at the Lord's Supper.

2) Which brings us to the pattern. We've got the Problems at the Lord's and now we have the Pattern of the Lord's Supper. **Read 23-26**

So what we have here are commonly called the "words of institution." These are the words that we typically say right before we take the bread and right before we take the wine. It seems as though throughout history the church has seen this as the pattern to verbally repeat when take the elements.

Paul says that this pattern was delivered to him. No one taught him this. Jesus himself gave to Paul this pattern to follow. And this pattern is important, just like other patterns are important.

Do you remember what we say when someone is baptized? "I baptize you in the name of what?" The Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. That's part of the Great Commission in Matthew 28. There's always truth that is proclaimed when we partake of the sacraments.

This isn't like abstract art that we get to interpret on our own. No. God has a specific message that goes along with the symbol because the message is just as important as the symbol.

I was talking to a guy once at McDonalds. He had finished up his lunch and he saw me with my Bible open and came over and started talking. Turned out he claimed to be a believer but hadn't been to church in decades and didn't think he needed to go. Among several questions I asked him, I asked him if he knew we were commanded to take the Lord's Supper and when the last time he had taken it. He said "Well, I just did!" "Your Big Mac and Diet Coke without a thought to God is not the Lord's Supper."

Diet Coke and Big Mac aren't the pattern. Reading news while digesting those fries is not the same as what we do every week. And there's no truth being proclaimed.

God wants a specific meal to be remembered and specific truth to be proclaimed. And he wants these truths proclaimed often. **Read 25**

He says "as often as you drink of it." This has caused a lot of difficulty over the centuries as to what exactly this means. Are we to take the Lord's Supper every week? Is it okay to take it less often? What does "as often as you drink of it" mean?

Two things: First, we don't have a specific frequency spelled out here. It seems clear from the book of Acts that the pattern of the early church was to take it at least every Sunday, probably more often than that. But there's no command, just a pattern.

Second, it does seem like it is to be taken often. Acts 2 says that the church dedicated themselves to praying, teaching, fellowshiping and the Lord's Supper: breaking bread.

But whenever we do it - as often as we do it - we proclaim these words. The words of institution are important words because they remind us that this meal actually looks back to when Jesus transformed the Passover meal into the Lord's Supper.

Look back at Matthew 26:26. This is the last night of Jesus - the night before he died. This section is recorded in Matthew, Mark and Luke. If you compare the 3 gospels you'll notice there are subtle differences between them. All have the same basic wording, but some of the writers include other elements as they highlight different aspects. We'll look at them all in a few minutes.

But first you need to understand how big of a deal it is that Jesus is changing this meal. The Jews had celebrated the Passover meal as a reminder of their deliverance out of Egypt for almost 1500 years. Celebrating the Passover was celebrating the defining act of God in salvation for all of history up to this time. When God delivered his people Israel out of Egypt in a single night by killing the firstborn sons of the Egyptians and miraculously delivering the Jews through the Red Sea.

God was the deliverer, Moses was the prophet and that night defined the people God. And Jesus says, "You know what, that night was just a shadow of what I'm about to do. That was just a preview of coming attractions. The real deliverance, the real salvation is coming - and it's coming through me." **Read 26-29**

So Jesus says he's changing the meal that has defined God's people for most of recorded history. These specific elements were no longer about leaving Egypt in a hurry. They were about feasting on the God-Man who would forgive their sins. This was a huge shift in salvation history.

The words themselves are probably very familiar words. And something to keep in mind is that this is not the only thing that Jesus said that night. If you look at John's gospel there's a 4 chapter section of Jesus's teaching during this very supper. John doesn't include the words of institution, but he includes a lot of the other words Jesus taught that same night in the Upper Room.

And what we have from Matthew isn't just the words that Jesus used, but he's also helping us to understand that it's appropriate for us to recite these words when we take the Lord's Supper. Matthew is recording for us a pattern that we follow.

And there's a lot of elements we can point out.

First thankfulness - he blessed the meal meaning he gave thanks for the food and for the meaning behind the meal.

Second, the connection between the bread and the body of Jesus. Jesus says "This is my body."

Now, we reject the view of the Roman Catholic Church that takes the words of Jesus "this is my body" literally. That view is called transubstantiation. Trans - meaning change, and substantiation meaning substance. They believe the substance of bread supernaturally changes at the Lord's Supper to become the real body and blood of Jesus. "That's what the text says!" They claim.

We do not believe that; we believe this is simply a metaphor. We believe that it simply represents his body. There are all kinds of theological problems that come up with that view. The greatest problem of which is that if this is Jesus's literal body and blood what that means is that Jesus is still being sacrificed week in and week out rather than having been sacrificed once at the end of the ages to put away sin.

It seems best to take this simply as a metaphor.

So there's thanks, there's the connection between the bread and the body of Jesus. There's the cup. **Read 27-28**

Again, the wine doesn't turn literally into the blood of Jesus, nor does it turn into the physical essence of the New Covenant. It simply represents his blood and represents the means by which the New Covenant - the new promise of Gods - was solidified.

And the essence of the New Covenant - from our perspective anyway - is that our sins are forgiven through faith in Jesus.

When you drink the bitter wine - and I think it should be somewhat bitter - what you're getting a taste of is the bitter cup of wrath that Jesus drank down when he endured the full force of the wrath of the Father for all those who would believe in him. He hung on the cross enduring in 3 hours what only he could endure on behalf of his people.

You guys, it's that little taste, week in and week out, that reminds us that our sins are no more. They are forgiven. We taste a slight twinge. He tasted death for us all.

His death was substitutionary and atoning. His blood was poured out for the many. Who are the many? It's those who would believe in him. Those who are called to be his people. He died on our behalf. We say that it was substitutionary. He suffered for us. And it was an atoning sacrifice, we are forgiven.

And this meal is eschatological. The Passover was a meal that was focused mainly on the past. It was focused on the word of God back in Egypt.

Jesus says there is a sense that when we take the meal we are looking back to his sacrifice. But we're also to take it looking to the future - to the end. That's what eschatology means - looking forward to the end. And we take this meal eschatologically: looking to the future. **Read 29**

We keep taking the meal over and over. But Jesus hasn't taken it for 2,000 years. He's present with us, but spiritually not physically. We take this meal looking forward to the day when we sit literally and physically with Jesus in glory eating and feasting celebrating his death, life and reign forever no ever.

Turn back to 1 Cor 11. Paul also makes sure we understand that the Lord's Supper is eschatological. **Read 26**

So this is cool. It's not just that we're reminding ourselves of the death and resurrection of Jesus. It's not just that we're being refreshed in his grace or communing with him spiritually. Those are all true and precious.

But did you know there's a sense in which **we are all** preaching when we take the Lord's Supper. We are all proclaiming:

Jesus has died, his blood has been spilled, our sins are forgiven! Hallelujah!

And you say, "well, what about his resurrection?" That's one of the most amazing parts of the Lord's Supper. Just the fact that we're taking it assumes he rose. How long are we taking this meal?

Until he comes. Comes from where? From heaven. How'd he get there? Because he's not still dead. He rose, and ascended and is reigning until every enemy is made a footstool under his feet.

And then he comes in glory and in power for the eternal joy and hope of all his people who will sit down in his Kingdom with him and enjoy this meal forever.

We celebrate that the Lord has come. But we also proclaim to each other every week that he's coming again.

Come quickly Lord Jesus!

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