



The Feasting Fools

1 Cor 11:17-34

Meals are an important part of life. Obviously as we need to eat to live! However one important part of meals is that they are a social event – an art that's being lost in many households these days. Whether it is a couple's romantic dinner, a family meal, a business breakfast, a wedding banquet or whatever, meals bring people together to talk, to celebrate or just socialise. Meals are an important part of being social because that's what human beings have been created as: social beings.

At Corinth the Lord's Supper was part of a bigger communal meal that was celebrated by the church – what we would today call an agape - a fellowship meal. However, they were not commended for their celebration of the Lord's Supper. Quite the reverse, Paul found it truly objectionable!

What was SO bad about the practices at Corinth that the people brought judgement on themselves? It all involves the idea that the Lord's Supper being something that was communal. In fact, it's why we use the term communion. A famous passage also in 1 Corinthians used to express this idea:

1 Cor 10:14 So then, my dear friends, keep away from the worship of idols. 15 I speak to you as sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. 16 The cup we use in the Lord's Supper and for which we give thanks to God: when we drink from it, we are sharing in the blood of Christ. And the bread we break: when we eat it, we are sharing in the body of Christ. 17 Because there is the one loaf of bread, all of us, though many, are one body, for we all share the same loaf.

In the AV “a sharing in” was translated “communion” which is why the word got adopted by Protestant churches in particular. The Catholics and some Protestants use the word Eucharist to describe Communion. That means thanksgiving. The term communion is less common to describe the Lord's supper because much of their ceremonial is front led and not necessarily shared in full.

18 Consider the people of Israel; those who eat what is offered in sacrifice share in the altar's service to God. 19 Do I imply, then, that an idol or the food offered to it really amounts to anything? 20 No! What I am saying is that what is sacrificed on pagan altars is offered to demons, not to God. And I do not want you to be partners with demons. 21 You cannot drink from the Lord's cup and also from the cup of demons; you cannot eat at the Lord's table and also at the table of demons. 22 Or do we want to make the Lord jealous? Do we think that we are stronger than he?

Traditionally the Catholics have taken this to mean that the bread is literally the body and the wine the blood and somebody in the early medieval period created a contorted theology of transubstantiation to explain how the bread and wine would change into real flesh and blood. What a load of nonsense! Read a few verses down and we see the meaning. Some Corinthians had been eating and drinking at pagan temples, ostensibly with the argument that as idols aren't real, it doesn't matter what we eat.

Not so says Paul. The god to whom the food and drink is dedicated to may be a myth, but

the demonic behind it is real and stuff dedicated to demons is theirs and they were identifying and showing allegiance with the demonic by so freely eating stuff offered to idols.

In saying this Paul is telling us something profound, we are sharing together when we take communion with the broken body and shed blood of Christ. He is why we exist as church, why we exist as the children of God. He is why we have found forgiveness and life. We all share in Him because it's only through His finished work on the cross are we able to be here. It's the ultimate leveller – we are all one in Christ.

Which is why things were so disastrous in Corinth. There was nothing wrong with a fellowship meal that would finally focus on Jesus. It was a great idea. But Corinth was riven by schism. The fellowship meal wasn't a shared meal. Each group brought their own food and obviously didn't share as the poor went without. The church was a divided church. It wasn't divided on matters of principle although it is important to discern difference between truth and falsehood. This was all to do with class, lame theology, money and personal differences – in Corinth there was a *“callous insensitivity to the physical needs of those who had little.”* (David Prior) In some respects it was a mix of drunken revelry and starvation. What a farce!

They had broken the first rule of communion. The meal should have been an expression of their life together in Christ – with Jesus as the focus. But it was all about them. Paul wanted to emphasise that this was an horrific mistake to make which was having disastrous consequences for them. Let's see what he had to say. What, then was so significant about Communion.

It is a command of the Lord Himself Paul stresses that this is something that has come from the Lord Himself. *For I received from the Lord the teaching that I passed on to you.* The head of Jewish family did all the stuff as Passover – Jesus as head of His disciple group took on that role of authority – He broke bread. He is our Head. He speaks with authority.

The meal was given with the authority of Jesus. The Lord's Supper is a command of Jesus, directly ordained by Him. Communion is not just sharing together, it is sharing Jesus. In doing so we identify with Him. We recognise that it is only through His sufferings and shed blood that we are saved, we are who we are.

It's a mark of our allegiance. I've already said something about this when I talked about sharing the body of Christ. What's interesting that Paul uses the phrase *“on the night he was betrayed, Jesus took bread”* etc. There was one disciple present who communed with Jesus but His heart was somewhere else – he was Judas, the betrayer. The suggestion under all this is that in not taking communion seriously, the Corinthians had betrayed Jesus as they had made a mockery of what it was about and in doing so betray Jesus.

Quite strong isn't it. It's meant to be. Communion is simple yet profound. We take it seriously because what it involves is the very heart of our faith. The one we follow is the one who we share in, show our allegiance to. So for these people to reflect their own prejudices, to show no love to others and have a good time wasn't just neglect, but an outright betrayal of all that Jesus did on the cross.

It is a mark of God's promises It's interesting how Paul presents the Bread is body but cup is the new covenant sealed with His blood. It isn't just about sin and forgiveness, it is about recognising that God has made a covenant with us in the shedding of Jesus' blood. Communion is an affirmation that despite of who we are and what we did, God has made eternal promises through us and the seal of that promise – the thing that makes it solemn and true is the shed blood of Jesus. And it stays as THE important reminder of who we

are until He comes.

It is a means of proclamation 25 *In the same way, after the supper he took the cup and said, "This cup is God's new covenant, sealed with my blood. Whenever you drink it, do so in memory of me."* 26 *This means that every time you eat this bread and drink from this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

This remembering is not just a reminder but a means of proclamation. Jesus is only with us by His Spirit right now. One day He will be with us. In communion we don't just talk about the past, but it proclaims our expectation of the future. His death and new covenant gives us that expectation. . An expectation of glory. It should be looking forward, not an expression of now. It is more a proclamation than a remembrance of what is past. But it is a proclamation. When do we ever see communion in an evangelistic sense? But why not? We do the same with baptism. Both ordinances are Christ-given pictures. It's not just a bit of habit or ceremonial for the sake of it. Jesus asked us to do little. Why? To avoid empty religion definitely. But think on this. They are powerful but very simple yet very profound pictures of what it means to be a Christian. And the Spirit takes them and changes people's lives radically through them – in practice this is invariably true.

That's why the Corinthians were in big trouble. They had turned something of Christ given profoundness into a selfish farce.

27 It follows that if one of you eats the Lord's bread or drinks from his cup in a way that dishonours him, you are guilty of sin against the Lord's body and blood. 28 So then, you should each examine yourself first, and then eat the bread and drink from the cup. 29 For if you do not recognize the meaning of the Lord's body when you eat the bread and drink from the cup, you bring judgement on yourself as you eat and drink. 30 That is why many of you are sick and weak, and several have died. 31 If we would examine ourselves first, we would not come under God's judgement.

It's one of the most solemn pieces of NT. They were suffering because of their open selfishness and quite frankly, rebellion against something of utter profoundness and gravity. And they had opened themselves to suffering and death. They were a church that should have known better. They had no problem with exercising spiritual gifts. Miracles were commonplace. They had experience the power of God. How dare they spoil something that was so directly a command of Jesus Himself.

The message is simple. God has given us something wonderful, profound, important. Take it seriously.

So here we are, with the table before us. Let's do what we've come here for tonight and remember Jesus and be thankful.

Prayer of Confession then Communion

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17 In the following instructions, however, I do not praise you, because your meetings for worship actually do more harm than good. 18 In the first place, I have been told that there are opposing groups in your meetings; and this I believe is partly true. 19 (No doubt there must be divisions among you so that the ones who are in the right may be clearly seen.) 20 When you meet together as a group, it is not the Lord's Supper that you eat. 21 For as you eat, you each go ahead with your own meal, so that some are hungry while others get drunk. 22 Don't you have your own homes in which to eat and drink? Or would you rather despise the church of God and put to shame the people who are in need? What do you expect me to say to you about this? Shall I praise you? Of course I don't!

23 For I received from the Lord the teaching that I passed on to you: that the Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took a piece of bread, 24 gave thanks to God, broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in memory of me." 25 In the same way, after the supper he took the cup and said, "This cup is God's new covenant, sealed with my blood. Whenever you drink it, do so in memory of me."

26 This means that every time you eat this bread and drink from this cup you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. 27 It follows that if one of you eats the Lord's bread or drinks from his cup in a way that dishonours him, you are guilty of sin against the Lord's body and blood. 28 So then, you should each examine yourself first, and then eat the bread and drink from the cup. 29 For if you do not recognize the meaning of the Lord's body when you eat the bread and drink from the cup, you bring judgement on yourself as you eat and drink. 30 That is why many of you are sick and weak, and several have died. 31 If we would examine ourselves first, we would not come under God's judgement. 32 But we are judged and punished by the Lord, so that we shall not be condemned together with the world.

33 So then, my friends, when you gather together to eat the Lord's Supper, wait for one another. 34 And if any of you are hungry, you should eat at home, so that you will not come under God's judgement as you meet together. As for the other matters, I will settle them when I come.