

## **“The Lord’s Supper”**

19 September 2021 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

### **Welcome & Call to Worship**

**Hymn of Preparation:** IPH 161 Holy, Holy, Holy

### **Prayers of Adoration & Confession**

**Reading:** 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

### **Sermon:**

Today we have a God given opportunity to talk about communion or the Lord’s Supper as the apostle Paul points out problems with it in the church of God in Corinth. The Lord’s Supper is the special meal, modelled on Jesus’ last Supper with his disciples as part of the Jewish Passover meal. The problem with the meal in the Corinthian church has given us insight into the practice of the early church and we have clear apostolic instructions for how it should be enacted in all churches, which we follow today.

Many of you have rightly been enquiring about the absence of communion in ARPC. The elders are aware of this and desire to celebrate communion asap. Our hesitancy up until now was because of safety re Covid, our inability to have everyone present, our desire to use one loaf because of how essential that symbol is to the meaning of communion as the body of Christ and an acknowledgment that the Covid pandemic was a sobering exile experience, which God has allowed, a metaphorical exile, in which we humble ourselves under his sovereign hand.

Gladly the period of “exile” appears to be ending, and we are waiting for further instructions from PCI and will hopefully celebrate the Lord’s Supper soon, and certainly before the end of the year. DV! So let us see what the Lord’s Supper is, and how it should be celebrated.

### **I. Not the Lord’s supper (v.17-22)**

The church in Corinth probably met in homes and when they speak of the Lord’s Supper it took place as part of a larger meal which involved food and alcohol (wine). As the church in Corinth grew, those who attended, new believers and those who were seeking or exploring this new faith, brought the influences and attitudes of their previous lifestyle into the church. Feasting, drinking, and self-indulgence was the norm in society! Paul has heard about their behaviour (v18) and he strongly disapproves of how they were celebrating the Lord’s Supper, labelling their church meals and Lord’s Supper as divisive, harmful, and humiliating for those who were obviously poor. He is forthright and clear in his condemnation of what was happening, *“I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good”* (v17).

Having been told of these practices and divisions, he believes what he has heard, though he hopes it isn’t as bad as reported. (v18) Those who have plenty are being criticised because of their behaviour towards the poor. But what does he mean in v19!

The differences refer to the rich, and poor and that shows God’s approval! Some commentators say Paul is being sarcastic, the rich consider themselves approved by God

and the poor are not blessed. The sarcasm shows Paul does not agree with such an assessment.

Others believe Paul is not being sarcastic but very serious. Such selfish divisive behaviour by the rich shows they do not have God's approval. I tend to favour this as I have never been a fan of attributing sarcasm to any biblical writer, and it fits with the content of what Paul says next. Paul addresses the church and specifically the small group of rich and influential people within her and his verdict is clear, (v20) "*When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper that you eat.*" The suppers you eat are about self, eating and drinking and not sharing, they are about showing off how much you have and even humiliating those who don't have anything. The rich and the way they act is an indicator they are mistaken about God's approval, his verdict is clear, He has NO praise for them in this practice. (v22)

Being rich tends to separate, and it often makes us think we have God's blessing. Such pride is wrong, God always opposes the proud, and having plenty is not an indication of God's approval, it is what we do with what we have that matters. Always move away from pride, selfishness and judgmentalism. Any behaviour that divides the body of Christ is not right, so your Supper is NOT the LORD'S SUPPER!

## **II. Jesus and the Lord's Supper (v.23-26)**

When you want to find out how much you have strayed it is important that you re-examine the original and that is what Paul does in v.23-26, he brings us back to the night Jesus was betrayed. Some see this as a pointed reference to a similar betrayal by these rich people within the church. Paul reminds them of the first Lord's Supper, on the night he was betrayed, he says he has directly received the instruction from the Lord Jesus, how he received it is debated!

Paul has already written about the Lord's supper in Ch 10:16-17. The bread, the one loaf, is received with thanksgiving and broken as a symbol of Jesus' body, offered on the cross, "*which is for you*". Jesus gave himself for you. The image is Passover, and it is substitutionary, of one giving themselves for another. Jesus is given for all, for male and female, for rich and poor, for Jew and Greek and so the oneness of the offering, the inclusiveness of the substitution is anathema to selfish division.

Similarly with the cup of wine, it is a symbol of his life given through his blood and seals a new covenant which is the image of Sinai and the giving of the law and the acceptance of the people of Israel as God's people. They belong to the Lord and to each other and they are a new covenant community, the church.

The meal is done in remembrance of me, as the Passover meal took the Jews back to the night of salvation in Egypt, so the Lord's supper takes us back to the night he was betrayed and we vividly remember that night, we are present. The remembrance brings us into the reality of his presence, we are in Jesus' presence as we partake of the meal, the bread and the wine.

As we eat, we are there at the cross, we are present with Jesus, therefore it is the death of Jesus that predominates the meal. In v26, Pauls says, "*For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death*" and we do this, "*until he comes.*" We take this meal in the hope of Jesus coming back again to earth and the recreation of the heavens and the earth when we will physically eat with him and each other face to face. It is a beautiful, profound, serious and significant moment. (Like the joy of being able to eat with a family

friend after a period of lockdown). **In the Lord's supper, the death of Jesus is central, the presence of Jesus is real, the return of Jesus is dominant, and the love of Jesus controls it all.**

### **III. Correctives! (v.27-34)**

To eat the Lord's supper rightly, implies the presence of saving faith as we understand the cross and Jesus' substitution for us as sinners and a lifestyle lived under his Lordship as we understand the new covenant which we enter through his death.

Therefore, if you participate in the Lord's supper and you do not believe in Jesus as your Lord and saviour you eat and drink in an unworthy manner.

If you consider yourself a Christian believer but remain unrepentant in some sin, you eat and drink in an unworthy manner.

If you are out of fellowship with a member of the church and take part in the meal you eat and drink in an unworthy manner.

Paul clearly says, "*You will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of Jesus*" (v27) To take part in the Lord's Supper and not believe and not take sin seriously means, you disrespect, you trample on, you trivialise Jesus, the reality of the cross and the church. His body and blood! His body as God and man, his body offered in self-sacrifice for your sin, and his body the people of the church. This is a deeply serious thing because it brings judgement (v29) and Paul believes judgement has begun within the church by many being weak, sick and dying (fallen asleep)

I am conscious we find these words difficult; we worry if our sickness could be linked to our sin; or we struggle to fit God's judgement into our view of God as love; and so, we avoid thinking about it and ignore the reality of it. Yet we know that symptoms such as weakness and sickness require immediate attention especially when they can be treated effectively. Paul now offers an effective treatment plan.

- A. **Self-examination.** (v28 and v31) This is a concept we are all familiar with and use every day. A look in the mirror before we leave to meet someone. A read over notes before a meeting or exam. Checking the doors and windows before leaving the house. We naturally self-examine to make sure that we will not be a victim, or embarrass ourselves, avoid humiliation or suffer punishment. Paul's first remedy is to self-examine, before we partake of the Lord's supper.

The reformers had a practice of "fencing the table", metaphorically erecting a barrier to participation and that is a practice we follow in ARPC where before everyone takes part in the supper, these words are read.

*So let us examine ourselves.*

- *Are we trusting in Christ alone for salvation?*
- *Do we have any unconfessed sin?*
- *Is there anyone here with whom we need to say sorry?*

In doing so we follow Paul's advice to avoid dis-honouring Jesus. If we are aware of sin, then that is not a reason to not participate but to repent and crave the forgiveness, and grace offered through the cross and celebrated in the communion.

B. **Judgement as discipline:** it is important to see the truth expressed in v32 that for the believer there is no condemnation and judgement is discipline. Therefore, weakness, sickness and even death are warning symptoms that should be accepted as discipline to bring us back to the Lord. Therefore, it is important in our self-examination to ask God the question, is there anything in my life you specifically need me to deal with. If there is then deal with it, through repentance and restitution. Usually there will not be anything specific, but it is always helpful to commit ourselves afresh to God because all sickness reminds us of the presence of sin in the world and in our lives.

God is good and good discipline is helpful for growth in putting sin to death and progress in righteousness or being more like Jesus Christ.

C. **Wait for each other:** *“when you come together to eat, wait for each other.”* Be aware of others, wait, consider others, in this way you recognise others in church as the body of Christ and give them appropriate honour. When we say that someone waits on tables in a restaurant, we mean they serve. Waiting means having the desire to serve each other in church, aware and concerned about their needs and doing what we can to meet those needs as Jesus met ours by his service.

Practically the meal at church is not about satisfying hunger and if that is an issue for you make sure you eat at home so that you are not so hungry and lose focus of what the meal is primarily about, proclaiming the death of Jesus, fellowship and service of one another. Remembering this helps overcome any division created by being rich or by being poor and relishing the very presence of Jesus. By such practice in line with the original Lord's Supper, you will not come under God's judgement and instead be blessed by the grace of his work on the cross and the reality of his presence.

When we celebrate the Lord's Supper let us remember well His death for us and partake of it in line with Paul's instructions so that we honour Jesus and one another.

**Praise:** Jesus, Thank You

**Prayers for Others**

**Announcements**

**Closing Hymn:** IPH 150 The Church's One Foundation

**Benediction**

**Discussion Questions:**

Discuss how the Corinthian church was celebrating the Lord's Supper. What was occurring that distressed Paul?

How does the Lord's Supper consider the past, present and future? How can we facilitate having all these elements highlighted in our celebration of the Lord's Supper?

Why is dishonouring the Lord's Supper serious? How can we guard against doing so?