



## First Baptist Church At The Villages

### Discipleship Group Lesson

Series: Under Authority • Title: The Lord's Supper • Main Passage: 1 Corinthians 11:17-33 •

for use by groups 05/20 - 5/25/2019

## Main Point

Our celebration of the Lord's Supper should be a time of uniting around God's grace.

## Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**What's the most celebrated or memorable meal you have ever been a part of? What made it so special?**

**Why do you think shared meals are so often a part of our celebrations in life?**

Consider the meals we share together. We rarely gather simply to eat, but also to serve and share with others. We celebrate birthdays, holidays, and special occasions, usually by sharing a meal. These moments at the table communicate something about an event's importance, and they connect us to each other in a way that other activities do not. This is especially true about the meal told us to celebrate together—the Lord's Supper. Paul was firm in his direction to the Corinthian church regarding the Lord's Supper.

## Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Have a volunteer read 1 Corinthians 11:17-22.

**According to Paul, how were the Corinthians falling short when it came to having the Lord's Supper? How were these practices impacting the community of believers as a whole?**

**Why does Paul say that God allows such division to take place?**

**What would it mean to be recognized as a “genuine” believer in this case?**

There were many points of division in the Corinthian church, and their practice of the Lord’s Supper was particularly disturbing to Paul. It seems that the wealthier members of the church ate and drank first, taking everything and leaving the poor without the Lord’s Supper and hungry. Because real love involves the whole family of God, Paul would not allow such division to continue, despite the fact that God was using it to reveal the spiritual quality of those in the congregation.

| Have another volunteer read 1 Corinthians 11:23-33.

**According to Paul’s account of the Lord’s supper, Jesus referred to the bread as His body. How has this idea been interpreted throughout Christian history? What is our church’s interpretation of this phrase? How does one’s interpretation of this phrase impact the gospel message as a whole?**

**Jesus refers to the cup as “the new covenant in my blood.” What were the terms of the Old Covenant? Why was it insufficient? How does the New Covenant completely solve the problem of sin?**

**How does partaking in the Lord’s Supper proclaim Christ’s death? To whom is it proclaimed in this context? Why should Christ’s death be proclaimed?**

Jesus’ expression, “This is my body,” has been widely interpreted throughout church history. Roman Catholics claim the bread and wine literally become the body of Christ (transubstantiation), while Lutherans claim that the body and blood of Jesus are “in, with, and under” the bread and wine (consubstantiation). Most Protestants take the phrase to mean that Jesus is present symbolically, though likely present spiritually with the believer as well.

**Why was the behavior of the Corinthians incompatible with the meaning of the Lord’s supper?**

**Based on Paul’s instructions in this passage, what practices would you put into place prior to taking the Lord’s Supper?**

Given that the nature of Jesus’ death was gracious and sacrificial, the behavior of the Corinthians during the Lord’s Supper should have been the same. The practice of prayer and repentance prior to the supper would encourage humility and service in the church, rather than arrogance and division.

## Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**Division in the Corinthian church primarily manifested itself socially between those who had and those who had not. Is this a common problem in today's church? Why or why not?**

**What other areas of division should we guard against? How might the practice of the Lord's Supper help us do that?**

**How might recognizing Jesus' death in the Lord's Supper end division in the Corinthian church? How does the practice of the Lord's Supper encourage biblical community?**

## Pray

Close your time in prayer, asking God for a spirit of repentance and faith so that unity may thrive at our church for the glory of God and the spread of His glory in the gospel.

## Commentary

| 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

11:17. In the preceding section, Paul had begun with words of praise. But here he said, I have no praise for you. Paul's disgust with the Corinthians focused on how their meetings, or public worship gatherings, did more harm than good. Paul did not condemn them absolutely and categorically—he had already praised them for holding to many of his teachings on worship (11:2). Yet, his assessment was that the harm of their worship times outweighed the good. What kinds of things would yield this kind of condemnation? The Corinthians had corrupted one of the most sacred events in Christian worship: the Lord's Supper. They had not given due regard to the honor of Christ, nor had they honored or edified one another in the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

11:18. Paul began with in the first place, but never moved on to a second or third matter. His words should be understood to mean “the most important way this is true is.” He also added, I hear. Paul's criticism was that there were divisions among the Corinthians, but he had already addressed this issue extensively in chapters 1 through 4. Here, he focused on the divisions that existed when the Corinthians came together as a church. Paul's chief concern was that divisions perverted public worship.

11:20. Paul addressed directly to the issue at hand. When the Corinthian Christians came together to celebrate the Lord's Supper, divisions so corrupted it that it could not be called the Lord's Supper. Although this terminology is common in the church today, this passage contains the only expression of the phrase “Lord's Supper” in the New Testament.

11:21. Paul explained his remark by describing the report he had received. As the Corinthians ate, each of them went ahead without waiting for anybody else. This phrase each of you goes ahead may be translated as “each one takes his own supper.” Some in the church had lost the corporate aspect of the ritual and had come to focus mainly on themselves. In their meals, the Corinthians favored the privileged and rich. If the Lord’s Supper was observed in Corinthian homes, the rich and powerful may have been allowed to eat first. Since one remained hungry while another got drunk, they obviously ate and drank to excess. This would have been bad enough, but they magnified the harm by leaving nothing for the others.

11:22. Paul began his correction by asking several questions. First, he asked if they did not have houses in which to eat and drink ordinary meals. Second, Paul expressed the evil of this practice by asking those who abused the poor if they despised the church of God. The church consists of those people gathered out of the world because they belong to God. Third, Paul asked if the rich members of the Corinthian church actually wanted to humiliate those who had nothing. The poor of the ancient world were mocked and humiliated by the wealthy. Sarcastically, Paul asked if they thought he should praise them for their behavior. He then answered Certainly not!

11:23-24. Paul explained that he could not praise the Corinthians for their behavior because they had failed to observe the teachings about the Lord’s Supper he had passed on to them. Paul next described how to observe the Lord’s Supper. These instructions are so simple and straightforward that they appear abbreviated. Paul revealed the proper way to observe the Lord’s Supper by recounting how the Lord Jesus Himself had observed it on the night He was betrayed. Four verbal ideas described the activities surrounding the bread: took bread; had given thanks; broke it; and said. Jesus took bread, that is, He picked it up. Therefore, the breaking of the loaf portrayed the breaking of Christ’s body.

11:25. Paul turned next to the cup. He noted the parallel between the distributions of the bread and of the cup by saying that the latter occurred in the same way. Whereas 11:23–24 mention talking, thanking, breaking, and speaking, 11:25 mentions taking and speaking. Paul emphasized by repetition the one element that was absent from every Gospel account: Do this ... in remembrance of me. Paul saw the honor and remembrance of Christ as central to the Lord’s Supper.

Paul’s record of Jesus’ words closely parallels Luke’s account. The main point is that the wine represents the New Covenant in Jesus’ blood. The expression “New Covenant” derives from Jeremiah 31:31. In this passage the prophet Jeremiah described the covenant arrangement that God would make with the remnant of His people after they returned from exile. Ezekiel and Isaiah called the same restoration covenant the “covenant of peace” (see Isa. 54:10; Ezek. 37:26). Paul also reported that Jesus defined the New Covenant in terms of His blood. Christ’s sacrificial death paid the debt for sin. His death made it possible for people to enjoy forgiveness and new life in Him. The expression “in my blood” recalls the importance of blood rituals in covenant-making. Not every covenant in the Bible is connected to sacrificial blood, but blood sacrifice has been the way of good standing before God from the earliest times (see Gen. 4:4; Heb. 9:22).

Echoing what He said about the bread, Jesus exhorted His disciples, Drink it, in remembrance of me. The main purpose of the Lord's Supper is to draw the participants' attention to the centrality of Christ's saving work on their behalf. The importance of this motif for Paul is evident from the fact that Paul repeated it three times.

11:26. Paul closed his account of the institution of the Lord's Supper with an explanation of his unique repetition of the remembrance of Christ. Why should eating and drinking in the Lord's Supper focus on the remembrance of Christ? It is because whenever the church participates in the Lord's Supper, Christians proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. The expression proclaim occurs many times in the New Testament to describe the ministry of the church to the unbelieving world. It is the prophetic announcement to those outside the church that Christ is the only way of salvation. When the world sees the church eating and drinking in order to remember the significance of Christ's body and blood, the word of the gospel is made visible.

11:27. Whenever people participate in the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner, they are actually guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. To participate in the table in an unworthy manner has traditionally been interpreted broadly to mean to participate while having unconfessed sin. The unworthiness he had in mind was participating in the Lord's Supper in a way that failed to exhibit the unity of the church in Christ.

11:28-29. In general, the Lord's Supper should be a time of celebration in which Christians focus on Christ's honor, the church's unity, and the proclamation of the gospel. The focus should be on others, not on oneself. It is only in the preparation for the Lord's Supper that individuals must turn their attention inward.

11:30. Paul continued explaining the seriousness of violating the Lord's Supper by pointing out the judgment the Corinthians were experiencing as a result of their failure to observe the Lord's Supper properly. He wrote, many among you are weak and sick. Paul probably received information about illnesses in the church from messengers sent to him. Second, he remarked, a number of you have fallen asleep. Some in the church had died as a result of God's judgment against them because of their sin against the body of Christ.

11:31-32. Paul added the comment that if the Corinthians judged themselves, they would not come under judgment. In other words, if the Corinthians took time to evaluate themselves before the Lord's Supper and changed their actions based on this evaluation, God would not judge them with sickness and death.

11:33-34. Paul closed this section with a general summation, giving some final instructions. He appealed to the Corinthians with familial affection by calling them his brothers. Paul yearned for them to turn from this serious sin. To avoid God's judgment, they needed to do two things. First, they needed to wait for each other. Instead of the rich eating first and the poor not eating at all, all participants in the feast were to eat at the same time. Second, in order to eliminate any justification for not waiting for others, Paul added that anyone who was hungry should eat at home.

Why should this practical advice be followed? If the church would gather for the Lord's Supper in harmony and mutual consideration, then their meetings would not result in judgment. The discipline that God was inflicting on the church would cease because the Corinthians would have begun to celebrate the Lord's Supper in a way that pleased God, honored Christ, respected the church's unity, and proclaimed the gospel.