

What's the Sacrament of Communion all about?

Rev. Chad Smith *Trinity Presbyterian Church, Asheville*

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

A. Context of this church in Corinth

- i. Communion was weekly and held in the private homes of the upper class members of the church.
- ii. Communion was served in a dining room big enough to accommodate about 9 people while the lower class members sat or stood out in the atrium that would hold 30-40.
- iii. The upperclass members were (v. 22) “**shaming those who had nothing,**” gorging themselves on the food and getting drunk on the wine, while the poor in the church looked in from the outside.

B. “*judge the Body rightly*” – What does v. 29 mean? How were they judging the body wrong?

- i. Jesus' body or the Church (as in the body of Christ)?? **BOTH!**

Explanation – what “body” clearly does NOT refer to is the individual taking Communion.

Paul is linking Jesus' body with those it was given for, therefore to “**rightly judge the body**” means to see that Jesus' sacrifice unites you equally to a community!

By segregating the church they were showing they did NOT examine the “body of Christ” rightly.

Application: To “**judge the body rightly**” means to open your eyes to see your true family that you've been adopted in to by Christ, and to think of them, especially the “least of these,” as worthy of more importance than you.

* Paul's very strong rebuke is meant to set the Corinthian church straight because they were contradicting the whole point of the Lord's Supper by holding to class distinctions, which are obliterated by the Gospel.

C. The *horizontal* theology of Communion

- i. Jesus died to inaugurate a new way of living equally together with God.

* Jesus came to fulfill the law and remove the need for any barrier between the people and God and between one people group and another.

Application: The brokenness of Christ should bring broken people together. A mark that a church is healthy will be the welcoming presence of a wide spectrum of people sharing in their Common Savior.

- ii. (v. 26) The Lord's Supper is a beautiful way of “proclaiming” our equal deliverance through Jesus' death = actions speak louder than words.

iii. (v. 27) To be “*guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord*” means to forget that He gave us His body and His blood to reconnect us to Him and to others. There is no US and THEM at the foot of the cross!

D. Jesus' Judgment of Disunity

- i. Do vv. 30-32 still apply today? Jesus was and still is judging the selfish/individualistic disunity of the church.

Application: Have you ever been to a church that just feels miserable? That's a church that is suffering from being sick. You find people who have lots of time to gossip or fight about the color of the carpet or fixate on theological arguments, and the end result is getting sidetracked from mission, AND THAT IS THEIR JUDGMENT. And if one goes to be with the Lord, this passage is saying it's to actually spare him or her from falling away altogether along with "the world."

More Practical Application

1) Our actions during the Supper communicate something about what we believe.

Individuals who receive the elements and bow their heads like they're at a funeral ignoring everyone around them can send the wrong message. You're meant to look at your sin but the whole point of the meal is to remind us that Jesus gave His body as a sacrifice to deliver us, and He shed His blood for forgiveness of sins so that we might be free. We may start our look at our sin, but we must finish it at the table with Jesus!

2) What are we communicating at TPC? Are we judging the body rightly?

A. "Walking Communion"

- i. Are we unintentionally dividing up the Body at the table?
- ii. Is the focus on the right family, and who are we ment to commune with at the table?

3) A new way going forward

(v. 33) "So then, my brothers and sisters, wait for/on one another."

* Christian love always gives up preferences for the sake of loving those around us better.

** Your Session this past Tuesday night approved to change up our monthly "walking communion" to have **2 stations to serve up to 9 people at a time, and prayer will now be offered by elders for whoever wants it after partaking of the elements.** Non-communing members are certainly still encouraged to come up as well.

(There will be at least two designated elders to the left of the pulpit for those wanting prayer.)

Reasons

1) This is an attempt to focus horizontally on the whole family of God, rather than dividing up the church between those who have biological families at TPC and those who don't.

2) This is an attempt to keep the focus on communing vertically with Jesus, rather than focusing on an individual prayer "at the table."

* There *certainly* needs to be prayer for individual families in the life of the church, however we do not feel the Lord's Supper is the time and place. (Perhaps we need to create other avenues in the church for this! –

In part, this is why we're having a **Service of Prayer and Praise Sunday evening, January 29!!)**