

## 1 Cor 11 : 17 - 34 Gonerby, September 2012 (Acts 2:42 - 47)

### 1. Selfishness at the "Love Feasts" (1 Corinthians 11:17 - 22)

From the reading in Acts, we can see that since the beginning of the church, it was customary for believers to eat together. It was an opportunity for fellowship and for sharing with those who were less wealthy. Probably they finished this meal by observing a simple version of Holy Communion. The Christians called this meal the "agape feast" --which means "love feast" -- since its emphasis was showing love by sharing with each other.

This "feast" was part of the worship at Corinth, but some serious abuses had crept in. As a result, the love feasts were doing more harm than good to the church.

For one thing, there were various cliques in the church and people ate with their own "crowd" instead of mingling with the whole church family.

Another problem was selfishness: The original idea of the feast was sharing, but that idea had been lost. The rich people brought a great deal of food for themselves while the poorer members went hungry.

Finally, it seems some of the members were even getting drunk.

A drinking party is hardly the best way to prepare for the Lord's Supper. Scorning others is certainly not the way to remember the one who died for all people, rich and poor.

We can learn from the Corinthians-- it is important that we prepare our hearts when we come to the Communion.

### 2. Abuses at the Lord's Supper (1 Corinthians 11: 18 -- 34)

As Paul reminds us in this passage, on the evening before his death, Jesus shared a Last Supper with his friends, during which he took the cup of wine and the loaf — ingredients of a common meal in that day—and used them to establish a rite or ceremony which would prove to be a meaningful spiritual experience for believers.

However, the value of the experience depends on the condition of the hearts of those who participate; and this was the problem at Corinth.

It is a serious thing to receive the Communion with an unprepared heart and in a careless manner.

Because the Corinthians had been sinning in their observing of the Lord's Supper, God had severely disciplined them. "*For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep [have died]*" (verse 30)

What, then, should we do if the Supper is to bring blessing and not reproof?

#### **First, we should look back** (verse 23 -- 26a)

The broken bread reminds us of Christ's body, given for us; and the cup reminds us of His shed blood.

Jesus wants His followers to remember His *death*. Why? Because everything we have as Christians centers in that death.

It is not His life, or His teachings, that will save sinners—but His death. Therefore, we also remember *why* He died: Christ died for our sins; He was our substitute ([Isa. 53:6](#); [1 Peter 2:24](#)), paying the debt that we could not pay.

This "remembering" is not simply the recalling of historical facts-- just, as it were, to admire what Jesus did. We believe that as we remember, and as our hearts reach out by faith so we draw near to Jesus and he draws near to us in a mysterious spiritual sense.

So in Communion, first, we look back.

#### **Second, we look ahead** (verse 26b)

We observe this Communion "till He comes."

The return of Jesus is the great hope of the church and the individual Christian. Jesus not only died for us, but He arose again and ascended to heaven; and one day He shall return to take us to heaven.

#### **Third, we look within** (verse 28)

Paul did not say that we had to be *worthy* to partake of Communion, but only that we should partake *in a worthy manner*.

If we are to participate in a worthy manner, we must examine our own hearts. The Corinthians neglected to examine themselves, but they were experts at examining everybody else.

No one should come to the Lord's table who is not a believer. Nor should a true believer come to the table if his heart is not right with God and with his fellow Christians.

This is why in our church we have a time of spiritual preparation before we reach the Communion.

Though we should be careful to remember that it is not supposed to be a time of "spiritual autopsy" and grief, even though confession of sin is important.

It should be a time of thanksgiving and joyful anticipation of being with the Lord!

**Finally, we should look around** (verse 33).

The Communion is a family meal, and Jesus, the head of the family desires us, His children, to love one another and care for one another.

It is not really possible for Christians to get closer God while at the same time being separated from our fellow believers.

How can we remember the Lord's death and not love one another? "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another" ([1 John 4:11](#)).

The sharing of "The Peace" is an aid to looking round -- remembering each other before we share Communion.

### **Conclusion**

Look back, look ahead, look within, look around...