



What is the purpose of food? This is a question I’ve often asked myself. If you spend any length of time with me, I’m going to bring up the topic of food at some point and, with many of you, I’ve also commented on how I’d love to do a more thorough study on theology of food and feasting in the Bible. The reality is that food isn’t given to us as fuel for our bodies. While that is a huge part, food also plays a vital role in enhancing fellowship between people. For example, we can find it odd or sad if we see someone eating alone. We may even offer to eat with someone because we almost innately see eating alone as something unnatural. Instead, if we want to celebrate something or if we want to get to know someone better, food is often nearby.

This has been a cultural norm from the beginning of time throughout all societies. But just like sin distorts everything, it also has distorted the benefit of fellowshiping around food. Instead of food uniting, food has also been used to emphasize our divisions. Years ago, a friend of Tracy and mine told us a story about someone she knew who worked as wait staff for a place in the Upper East Side of Manhattan. This club was for the people who had the “old money” of the city. One time, the person was waiting on a table and she overheard two ladies sitting at a table, and one lady said, “It’s not that I’m against the middle-class. I just don’t want to eat with them.” Let that statement sink in. You’re probably shocked and disgusted (like I was the first time I heard it). But this woman was communicating the sinful mindset of fellowship that has gripped societies and nations throughout all time. This same mindset was something that the church at Corinth had embraced because it was simply the pervasive mindset in the Greco-Roman world.

What we discover about public feasts in that culture is that the host, who would have been wealthy because of the house size, would invite his closest friends of the same social class to rest with him in the atrium where they could recline at the table, and then those who were in other inferior classes, would eat in another room where they were forced to sit. David Garland notes that “The well-to-do were used to having servants stand around as they ate and also would have no misgivings about feasting in the presence of others who had nothing or had only inferior fare” (Garland, p. 543). And, an ancient writer named Lucian sarcastically writes the following about these ancient feasts:

Since I am asked to dinner. . .why is it not the same dinner served to me as to you? You take oysters fattened in the Lucrina lake, I suck a mussel through a hole in the shell; you get mushrooms, I take hog funguses; you tackle turbot root, but I brill. Golden with fat, a turtledove gorges you with its bloated rump; there is set before me a magpie that has died in its cage. . . The dole has gone: let us have the benefit of that, let us eat the same fare (as quot. in Garland, pp. 543-44).

Knowing this backdrop, we have an even greater understanding of the force of Paul’s words in the text we’re studying today. And so, to quote David Garland again, “Paul is intent on one thing: to uproot the

Corinthians' meal from the poisonous soil of Greco-Roman conventions and replant it in the nourishing soil of Christ's loving sacrifice for others" (Garland, pp. 534-44). In other words, the wisdom of the cross, which is foolishness to the world, transforms our view of others and creates a fellowship unlike what the world can offer, and in this text, Paul highlights the most important meal of Christians: the Lord's Supper. In this meal, we are meant to see that the wisdom of the cross gives us back the beautiful picture of food and fellowship. Therefore, I think the big idea of this text is that **The Lord's Supper should proclaim the cross of Jesus, not self.** Or, let's change the statement to a question. Sometimes in asking ourselves questions we are better helped to see if we are behaving correctly or not. So, I think the question God is essentially asking us through this text is, "Does what is done by the church, at what we call the Lord's Table, emphasize the Lord's death or our selfishness?"

Now, let's begin to enter the text itself. The title of this sermon is, "When you come together," and the reason I have titled it such is because this phrase is listed five times. This phrase is going to make up the main points, so I need to clarify what it means when Paul says, "when you come together." In verse 17, the phrase is simply "when you come together it is not for the better." In verse 18, he says, "when you come together as a church." At this point, you could be thinking Paul's point is simply talking about divisions when they come together as a church for their corporate worship gathering, but when you get to verse 20, he says "When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat." Right here, we know he's not simply talking about the gathering of the Corinthian church in general, but the gathering for the purpose of the Lord's supper. Then when we get to verses 33-34, he says "when you come together to eat" (emphasis mine). And then he simply saying "when you come together" in verse 34. This all implies Paul is being very specific about the type of church gathering that is taking place here: the gathering for the Lord's supper. "When you come together" here is synonymous with Paul as "When you come together to eat the Lord's Supper."

The terminology of Paul in these verses reveal that the Corinthians embraced the culture's practice even when it came to the Lord's Table, and as a result, they skewed the message of the gospel itself. They were making much of themselves and trampling on Christ. The bread and the cup were to speak to reconciling people together with God. Instead, the Corinthians used it as a weapon to communicate division with one another and separation from Christ. It's as if some were saying, "It's not like I don't like the poor, I just don't want to eat with you." So, with all of this in mind, let's go through the multiple "coming together" statements of Paul to see how (and what it means for) the Lord's Supper should proclaim the cross of Jesus, not culture.

When you come together:

1. It is not for the better but for the worse (v. 17).

Verse 17 says, "¹⁷ But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse."¹ In verse 2 of this chapter, Paul commends the Corinthians for some things they do, but here he says he cannot commend them. Why? When they come together, it's not for the better but for the worse.

I think we can all admit that when Christians gather together, it should always be for the better, not the worse. While we can gather with Christians at times and it be more painful than profitable, we all recognize that ought *not* to be the case. Why? Because we as Christians are to commit to love, serve,

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 11:17.

care for, exhort, admonish, help, strengthen one another. We are a people pursuing Jesus *together*; therefore, our goal is to help. But clearly the Corinthians had lost this mindset. They gather and it is for the worse. What we'll see is that "worse" means that the people are pointed away from the gospel of Jesus. That's what "worse" means. Now, let's see Paul's next statement:

2. There are divisions (vv. 18-19).

Look at verses 18-19 again: ¹⁸ For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, ¹⁹ for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. ²

When Paul says "in the first place," you would expect that he's going to then say something like "secondly" later on. He doesn't do this. Instead, at the end of this discourse, in verse 34, he writes, "About the other things I will give directions when I come."³ I believe he's saying, "We'll talk about the other concerns when I see you." So, he speaks of the main concern. When they come together *as a church*. So, this meal they're having is specifically a meal being had with their church family. It's not a meal with co-workers or a fundraiser of the wealthy. It's a gathering for a meal as the church. And, in this gathering, there are divisions among them. Just think about the irony of verse 18. How can you come together divisively? This is an impossibility. I mean, you can be under the same roof, but you can't truly be unified, right?

Division has been the reality amongst the Corinthians in many issues. They're more known for how different they are from each other than how unified they are around Christ. Yet, from the beginning Paul urges them to determine to know nothing among them but Jesus Christ and him crucified. This is true for us, too, Ventura. There are things you might greatly disagree on with others in this church, with even me. You might have a mindset that elevates you for whatever reason (wealth, job status, etc), yet we must always seek to be patient towards one another and seek to remind ourselves of how we can communicate and rejoice in our unity in Christ. Our differences fade away at the foot of the cross.

Well, in Corinth, there are divisions. And Paul goes on to say that he believes it "in part." Interestingly this English translation of "in part" can actually be more emphatic, where Paul is actually saying that he definitely believes it. Why does he believe it? Verse 19 gives the answer: for there must be factions. . . . Again, the Greek phraseology is very intriguing here. There are those who know Greek here so I want to be specific with what phrase I'm talking about. The *hoi dokimoi* actually was used to referred to the upper-class members of society. As a result, I think this sentence would be more aptly translated that he believes it's the case because in order for the elite to stand out and be recognized, there has to be factions.

So, what Paul reveals is that if you're going to live on the basis of your own acclaim and elevating yourself, guess what's going to happen? There's going to be division amongst God's people. But does God intend for there to be divisions over status? No! Satan seeks to destroy. Jesus came to bring God's people to him and to bring them together as one in him. As a result of this, Paul gives us the third statement:

3. The Lord's Supper is not being eaten (vv. 20-32).

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 11:18–19.

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 11:34.

This is the longest section. In it, Paul reveals to them how they really *aren't* celebrating the Lord's Table. The elements of bread and juice do not mean you're actually worshipping the Lord Jesus. What's really happening is a celebration of self. This meal is a coming together of people, keeping everyone in their social strata. Therefore, this isn't the meal of King Jesus. In his Kingdom, we all come at the same footing. This is simply a cultural meal with a supposed "Jesus" on the side.

We see this in what is actually happening. Read verses 20-22 with me now: ²⁰When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. ²¹For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. ²²What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not. ⁴

When they come together, it's *not* the Lord's supper they're eating at that gathering. Why? Verse 21. In eating, each person has his own meal. Then, one goes hungry and another gets drunk. This fits what I shared with you in that ancient writing of a person who longed to eat the finer things in the meal. To add a little more color to these meals, generally the wealthier individuals would bring the greater food, but they would eat their own food. It wasn't like a potluck where we bring something and all is shared. So the culture dictated to the Corinthians. And, as a result, those who brought their food, ate their food as an act of status! As a result, people are getting drunk while others are going away hungry. Those who are hungry are those in the church family who were poorer.

Ventura, if you ever think we have problems as a church or divisions too great, look at Corinth. By 2 Corinthians, we read of their repentance and growth in the truth. We have a church here where the rich and poor are divided and the poor uncared for and neglected, and yet the gospel of God is greater! It can (and did) pierce through them as it does in all churches, including ours.

Now, Paul states in verse 22 the shock of all of this and then essentially says, "Can you eat and drink in your own house?" In other words, the purpose of the Lord's Table isn't status and filling your bellies full. That's self-focused. Paul then asks if they despise God's church and humiliate others through their self-emphasis? As a result, Paul will not commend them in any of this. But I want to go back and think about communion again. We don't do the same things in our communion. After all, we just have a little cup and a little piece that we partake of. However, I can't help but wonder how often we come to communion primarily as individuals in the same room. **Do you think of communion as a reminder of our community and union with Jesus and those for whom he died?** The reality is that whenever we make ourselves the main point of communion, we miss Jesus and our love for others will wane. It's not commendable.

But why isn't it commendable? I'm so grateful that Paul takes some time to explain the Last Supper Jesus had with his disciples. This Passover meal where he expressed the greatness and goodness of him and his plan to rescue sinners. We will go through communion at the end of the service today and we are familiar with the events, but let's read verses 23-26: ²³For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, "This is my body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁵In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood.

⁴ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 11:20–22.

Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.⁵

The “For” of verse 23 means that Paul is giving a reason as to why it’s not commendable to be self-serving and self-emphasizing at communion. First, think about the words that Jesus was betrayed. Whereas the Corinthians were wanting to elevate their status as superior, Jesus didn’t act that way. Jesus, who is God in the flesh, did not fight back! He did not call the legions of angels to ward off the soldiers. No. Jesus humbly allowed Judas to kiss him on the cheek and betray him. Instead of cutting off the other ear of the soldier, he put on the one Peter cut off. He allowed them to shackle him. And, as a lamb before his shearers is silent, so Jesus was not argumentative. He went with the plan. Why? Because his body was to be broken so that all who are lost in sin may be found and brought together as one, united with God and one another. His brokenness led to healing. Jesus also shed his blood for us. As Hebrews 10 states, Jesus’ blood replaces the incessant blood on the altars under the old covenant in Moses. The author of Hebrews wrote, **“And every priest stands daily at his service, offering repeatedly the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. ¹² But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. . .”**⁶ When the New Testament uses “cup” to refer to Jesus, it has the biblical idea of wrath. This is consistent imagery in the Scripture, and it answers how Jesus could heal those who are broken and sinful. Him dying on the cross and experiencing the weight of the judgment and condemnation we deserved for our sins against God has led to forgiveness and freedom – if you have turned from your sin and trusted the Lord. I pray you have trusted Jesus. He has endured more than you can imagine, and he promises to give you rest and reconciliation with God. And, every time we participate in the Lord’s Supper, we are to communicate these realities. We don’t come together as mere individuals. We don’t come together elevating ourselves. No. We are reminded of who we were apart from Jesus and all Jesus has done for us, and continues to do for us. Our relationship with Jesus is based in grace. Our relationship with one another was bought by grace.

Paul now says “Whoever, therefore. . .” This means he’s going to give an application. So, let’s read verses 27-32: ²⁷ Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. ²⁹ For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. ³⁰ That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. ³¹ But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. ³² But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.⁷

One commentator writes of the Corinthian meal like this: The Lord’s Supper is founded on the sacrificial death of Jesus for others, and the attitude that led him obediently to that death should pervade the Supper for Christians ever after. The way the Corinthians conducted their supper, however, gave witness to a culture of selfishness and status-mongering (Hays 1997: 200). To conduct their supper in this way and to have the temerity to call it the Lord’s Supper can lead only to their condemnation.

This is where Paul is going here: condemnation. Paul is utterly serious about communion. It’s the meal of the Kingdom. We also ought to be utterly serious about it as well because it is a commanded picture for the saints to celebrate in and rejoice in God together. So, if anyone partakes in an unworthy manner, they will be guilty of the body and blood of Jesus.

⁵ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 11:23–26.

⁶ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 10:11–12.

⁷ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 11:27–32.

What does it mean to eat or drink “unworthily?” This word for “unworthily” means to do something that doesn’t match the nature of something. So, what is the nature of communion? I used to think “unworthily” meant that if I was unworthy I couldn’t partake of communion. But if I look inward to myself and my actions, am I going to garner enough *worth* to partake of communion? If I confess enough sins, will I be clean enough in and of myself? No! That’s arrogance and doesn’t match the message of communion. What matches the message of communion is that I, and all of you, come to Jesus by grace alone through depending on him alone for our reconciliation and forgiveness with God. When we partake of communion, we aren’t making much of us. We aren’t saying, “Look at how clean I made myself.” No. We are saying, “Look at how clean you’ve made me and made *us!*” We are feasting here together as a part of your kingdom, as kingdom citizens, all by your tremendous love and grace.

The Corinthians weren’t acting this way. Therefore, Paul says they’re guilty concerning Jesus’ body and blood. This term for “guilt” is a judicial term – like a Judge saying you’re guilty. If the Corinthian Christians continue this way with communion, they reveal they’ve never understood the gospel and the final Judge, God, will condemn them for being just as guilty as the people who took Jesus to the cross. In communion, they’re making a mockery of Jesus. Do they even believe? What about you? How do you view communion? Do you see yourself as unified with Jesus and others all by his grace and not by your works?

Now, Paul doesn’t say the whole church is condemned, but he is lovingly, sternly warning them. And now in verses 28-32, he gives encouragements on how they ought to behave at the Lord’s Supper. These are principles we can apply to our own lives as well. The first is **Examine yourself (v. 28)**. Verse 28 says, “Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.”⁸ Those who thought of themselves as dignitaries and wanted others to see them that way needed to humble themselves. Our notability doesn’t come from our dress, our wealth, our poverty, our cultural status, the tone of our skin. We are all honored together because Jesus is gracious. As you examine yourself, do you believe this? Do you agree with God on this? Do you revel in the mercy of God towards you? Secondly, Paul exhorts us to **Treat your church family as “worthy” (vv. 22, 29)**. Verse 29 says, “²⁹ For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.”⁹ Verse 22 said that we despise the church of God by focusing on our own individual selves. The church of God is God’s! It is comprised of ones for whom Christ died. And, I believe the point of verse 29 in discerning the body of Jesus means that we recognize not only our own individual status that we were broken and then healed, but that if we discern the body correctly, we will recognize we as a church are united in/by Christ’s body. Now, this doesn’t mean that I look at someone else’s social status as just as important as mine or I look at someone else I disagree with and then say, “Your point is just as right.” If we do that, then our unity is still around us. Instead, we treat each other as *worthy* all because of Jesus’ sacrificial life and death and resurrection! And this emphasizes the final point: **Discern Christ’s body (v. 29)**. I’ve already stated what this means, but I don’t want to miss the emphasis that communion is to be on Jesus primarily – not us! He is the One we worship and adore and submit to as Lord and Savior – all by his grace.

But the Corinthians weren’t living this way. So, Paul says in verses 30-32, “³⁰ That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. ³¹ But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. ³² But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the

⁸ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 11:28.

⁹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 11:29.

world.”¹⁰ Clearly God had given consequences to some of the Corinthians, and this reminds us that our God is holy! If we are saved by grace that doesn’t mean we take God tritely. Instead, we have the privilege to see him more for who he is and we are in awe of him! But Paul’s main point isn’t that people have been ill and have died. He doesn’t want that to be the case for the Corinthian Christians. Instead, he says that if you judged yourself truly, you wouldn’t be judged. Meaning, if you allowed communion to reorient your mind and to think correctly. If you were reminded again of who you were apart from Jesus and how much you still need him. If you were reminded of the all-sufficiency of his sacrificial death on the cross, then there’s no need for any judgment from God, and certainly you wouldn’t be condemned with the world because the world doesn’t embrace Jesus’ sacrifice on their behalf. Therefore, even these words of Paul are an act of God’s loving judgment so that they won’t be condemned. And for you, if you’ve missed the point of communion, your response shouldn’t be, “Oh man! I’ve missed it! I’m going to prove to God I’ll do better.” No. Instead, you go to the Lord in humility and say, “Oh Lord, I’m sorry. Oh Lord, thank you! Oh Lord, I need you.”

Now Paul gets to his conclusion of all of this in verses 33-34: ³³ So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another— ³⁴ if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for judgment. About the other things I will give directions when I come. ¹¹ This brings us to the final point:

4. Receive the Lord’s Supper together with the entire church family (vv. 33-34).

Paul says “when you come together” twice in these verses. Again, once he states it simply as when you come together, but then he says “when you come together to eat.” They’re saying the same thing. And in verse 33, he says “wait for one another.” This word can also mean to “receive” one another. Meaning, share in the meal together. Wealthy should share what they have and welcome the poor who couldn’t afford. They are family. Verse 34 is a parenthetical statement, and I think Paul’s getting at saying the purpose of the Lord’s Supper isn’t simply to fill your stomach. It’s not about you. It’s about the Lord. So, if you’re *really* hungry, eat something before you get there. Again, if you make it about you, all the Lord’s Supper is good for is your judgment. We don’t want that. We want to truly celebrate the Lord’s Supper.

With this in mind, let’s transition to the Lord’s Supper together right now. But before I do, let me say again, if you have never trusted in Jesus, I pray that you would. Or, if you are a believer, but you’re living pridefully and arrogantly, not embracing your need, repent! All repenting believers are welcome to participate!

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¹⁰ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 11:30–32.

¹¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Co 11:33–34.