

**A People Set Apart: The Lord's Supper**  
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When you really love something, it almost hurts to stay quiet. Why do sports fans love to boast about their team? Why do grandparents love to talk about their grandkids? Why is someone who just found an amazing restaurant eager to share the news? Because a significant part of our experience of joy lies in sharing it with others. In fact, the act of sharing our joy intensifies it!

Friends, the God with whom we have to do, who created the world and everything in it, loves no one more than himself. That is good and right, not selfish or small-minded, because no one is more glorious than him. And from eternity past, the delight God has in himself has been a shared joy. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit – have all participated in a communion of joy.

And that is the joy that he delights to share with us. It's why Jesus came and lived, died, and rose from the grave. He did it to bring you into an eternal experience of God's joy in God. John 15:11, "These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and your joy may be full."

If you want to experience God's joy in God, then there is one thing you need, friend. You need to see Jesus, hear Jesus, and experience Jesus for who he really is. And God gets that life-giving, joy-producing mission done by setting apart a people for himself. He makes a distinction between the world and the church that is so clear, so sharp, that the world knows exactly where to look to see Jesus.

Church membership matters because the world desperately needs the church to clarify who speaks for Jesus and who does not. For if God's people are not distinct, then God's people are not identifiable. In turn, Jesus is not distinct and Jesus is not identifiable. And if Jesus is not distinct or identifiable, then the world never knows where to look to see Jesus. His joy will never become their joy.

That's what our set-apart series is all about, friends. How do we exercise the responsibility God has given us to tell the community around us, "Look here to see Jesus"? We do it in an initial way by affirming professions of faith through baptism, welcoming believers into membership in the visible body of Christ. And we do it in an

ongoing way by affirming professions of faith through the Lord's Supper. This identifies members of the family by welcoming them to the family meal.

So let's look to God's Word in 1 Corinthians to answer three questions: (1) What is the Lord's Supper? (2) Who should participate? (3) How should we celebrate?

## **1) WHAT IS THE LORD'S SUPPER?**

### **A) An act of remembrance**

In 1 Corinthians 11:23-25, Paul reminds the Corinthians that the Lord's Supper is not something the church created. It's a meal Christ himself prepared. "For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' In the same way he took the cup, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.'"

As an act of remembrance, eating the bread and drinking the juice helps us to not forget the reality and significance of Jesus' death on the cross. His real body, signified by the bread, was broken for you. His real blood, signified by the juice, was shed for you. He died so you wouldn't have to die. Jesus was condemned so you could be justified. Jesus was stricken so you could be healed. Jesus was punished so you could receive mercy.

However, when Jesus says of the bread and cup, "Do this in remembrance of me," he's not telling us to merely remember the historical facts of the gospel – what Jesus did for us. He's exhorting us to remember the *present implications* and *future promises* of those historical facts! Because Jesus died and we died in him, what is true of you in the present, Christian? You are no longer enslaved to sin, Satan, and death. You have been redeemed from the house of slavery and set free to serve the Lord!

And what is true of you in the future? The hell we deserve has been replaced with the hope of heaven! Eating the bread and drinking the cup reminds us the real feast is yet to come, the feast we will enjoy with Jesus himself in the new heavens and the new earth. In that sense, the Lord's Supper is only an appetizer. It's designed to awaken and stir up our longing for the banquet to come. As we eat and drink, we remember the road of suffering will surely end in glory.

## **B) An act of fellowship**

When it came to their practice of the Lord's Supper, the Corinthians were in a heap of trouble. As Paul says in verse 20, you may be eating the bread and drinking the cup, but "It is not the Lord's Supper that you eat." Why not? Apparently, the church shared the Lord's Supper as part of a communal meal. And according to verse 21, rich members of the church were bringing piles of food and wine and having a grand old time in front of poor church members who had next to nothing.

The net result? They were creating division in the church, which made Paul indignant. Verse 22, "What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?" Why was Paul so upset? Because their practice of the supper contradicted the very spiritual reality the meal was designed to strengthen, namely, their unity in Christ as fellow members of his body.

Turn back in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 10. In 1 Corinthians 10:16 Paul writes, "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?" The word we translate as "Participation" in both places is the same word we translate elsewhere in the New Testament as "Fellowship." It describes a close association, union, or intimate relationship between two parties.

Why would Paul describe communion as fellowship in the blood and body of Christ? When you become a Christian, the Spirit of God unites you to the Son of God so that you are now "In Christ." His relationship with the Father as the Eternal Son becomes our relationship with the Father as adopted sons and daughters. The fellowship he has eternally enjoyed with God becomes the fellowship we enjoy with God.

Our faith-union with Jesus is so close, so real, that we become, in a spiritual sense, part of his body. 1 Corinthians 12:13, "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body..." So when we eat from a common loaf of bread in the Lord's Supper, we are affirming our common spiritual union with Christ. It's a physical expression of shared relationship with Jesus, a visible act of fellowship with God.

When we eat and drink, feeding by faith, as it were, on Jesus' all-satisfying provision, we experience the sweet joy of fellowship with him. As the bread and wine nourish our bodies in a physical sense, our faith in Jesus is nourished in a spiritual sense. But don't miss the horizontal implication. What does Paul say next in 1 Corinthians 10:17? "Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the

one bread.” When we share the Supper, we are also enacting and affirming our spiritual union with one another as fellow members of his body.

What Paul teaches us in this verse flies directly in the face of how many Christians today understand the Lord’s Supper. We think it’s all about me and Jesus and enjoying a deeply personal spiritual moment. No, it’s not! It’s about our union in him and as a result, our union with one another as fellow members of his body.

Eating together from one loaf of bread publicly affirms we are part of Christ’s body, the church. It’s a corporate meal, not an individual meal. It’s about fellowship with God AND fellowship with one another because they can’t be separated! Indeed, as Paul says in verse 17, the very act of sharing communion is an essential part of what makes us a local church and binds us together as members of Christ’s body.

And that’s why we celebrate it together. In verses 17, 18 and 20 of 1 Corinthians 11, Paul describes the context of the Lord’s Supper as “When you come together” or “When you come together as a church.” Why? Because the Lord’s Supper is a meal for the gathered assembly of the church. Paul expects the Corinthians to share communion in a context that’s consistent with the communal significance of the meal.

That’s why we don’t lead through communion over livestream, watch a bride and groom share it at a wedding, or bring it to a hospital room. It’s a meal Christ has given to his spiritual family to be enjoyed by the whole family because the meal, by its very nature, affirms our unity as a family. It’s an expression of fellowship with God and fellowship with one another as members of his body.

### **C) An act of mission**

The Corinthians were eating a meal that declares, “We are one,” while their actions at the meal declared the exact opposite. Yet, God used even their deceit and division to accomplish his good purposes. Verse 19, “For there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized.”

An essential part of our responsibility as a church is recognizing or affirming genuine professions of faith and denying false professions of faith. How do we do that? By practicing biblical church membership in keeping with Jesus’ charge in Matthew 16 and Matthew 18. We affirm professions of faith by using our God-given authority to baptize people, welcoming them into church membership. And we continue to affirm their profession by eating with them at the Lord’s table through communion.

The Lord's Supper, rightly practiced, does throughout the Christian life the same thing baptism does at the beginning of the Christian life. It recognizes and marks off the church from the world, those who are members of the body from those who are not. Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 5 provide a clear example of this principle. Turn there.

1 Corinthians 5:1-2, "It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you." He's talking about the final step of church discipline, removing someone from membership. So what practical difference does that make other than pulling their name off a list in the church office? It makes a tremendous and publicly visible difference!

1 Corinthians 5:9-12, "I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people – not at all meaning the sexually immoral of this world, or the greed and swindlers, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler – not even to eat with such a one. For what have I do to with judging outsiders? Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge."

What sort of eating does Paul forbid? The kind of eating that tells a spiritual lie. The kind of eating that affirms fellowship or association with someone as a member of the body of Christ when the course of their life completely contradicts their profession. At a minimum, he's talking about the Lord's Supper. How do we know that? Because the immediate context of Paul's admonition in verse 11 is his instruction in verses 6-8 about how to "Keep" the Passover festival under the New Covenant.

As eating the Passover marked off the people of God under the Old Covenant, so too eating the Lord's Supper marks off the people of God under the New Covenant. 1 Cor 5:7-8, "Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. Let us therefore celebrate the festival (share the Lord's Supper!) not with the old leaven, the leaven of malice and evil, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

To share the Supper with someone who is living in unrepentant sin, the opposite of "Sincerity and truth," is to "Celebrate the festival" in an unworthy manner. Why? Because their participation denies the sanctifying effect of Christ's sacrifice! It's the reason Paul admonishes all the existing members of the church in 1 Corinthians 11:28 to

“Examine” themselves before they “Eat of the bread and drink of the cup.” Verse 29, “For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.”

To discern the body is to soberly ask, “What’s the true nature of my relationship to the body of Christ? Has the one institution God has ordained on earth to affirm professions of faith, the local church, affirmed your profession through baptism and membership? Have they continued to affirm my profession as a member in good standing? Or is there unrepentant sin in my life such that I no longer have biblical grounds for confidence in the authenticity of my profession?”

Your own assessment is important but insufficient. Anyone can say they are good with God or even convince their parents they are right with God. A far more reliable, objective, and necessary test is whether Jesus’ authorized representative on earth agrees with your assessment or not? The family of God must recognize you as one of their own before you pull up a chair and eat a meal reserved for the family.

As baptism is our initial affirmation (or denial) of a profession of faith, so too the Lord’s Supper is our ongoing affirmation (or denial) of a profession of faith. 1 Corinthians 5 makes that principle crystal clear. When we welcome someone at the Lord’s table, we are publicly declaring to them, to the church, and to the world, “God’s Word gives us confidence to believe your profession of faith is still genuine.” And that’s why I say the Supper, rightly administrated, is an act of mission. We declare the truth of the gospel when we eat it, and by virtue of who we welcome to the table, what it means to trust and obey Jesus.

As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 11:26, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” Pulling all three elements of remembrance, fellowship, and mission together, we could define the Lord’s Supper this way. *The Lord’s Supper is a family meal by which we remember the price Jesus paid to make us one, affirming and receiving anew all the privileges of covenant relationship with God and one another.*

## **2) WHO SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN THE SUPPER?**

The answer to this question is a direct reflection of what the Supper is. In brief, the Lord’s Supper is for baptized members of a local church that preaches the gospel.

Why is church membership necessary? Because of what the Supper signifies. It's a participation in the body of Christ. And lest some say, "Isn't participation in the universal body of Christ sufficient?" remember the context of 1 Corinthians 5 and 11! Everything Paul says in 1 Corinthians 5, 1 Corinthians 10, and 1 Corinthians 11 is directed to *the local church in Corinth*, gathered under the authority of her elders.

The local assembly is the biblical context for the Supper. As the "One bread" in 1 Corinthians 10:17 was a tangible, physical thing, so too the "One body" in 1 Corinthians 10:17 is a tangible, physical thing. If a local church has not affirmed your profession of faith by welcoming you into membership or has stopped affirming your profession of faith by excluding you from membership, you are lying to yourself, to the Christians around you, to the world, and ultimately to God if you participate in the family meal.

It will not do to say, "I know I'm a member of the family." The question is whether the family has recognized you as a member of the family. That's what church membership is all about. And what is the biblical means God has given to his family, to the local church, to affirm professions of faith? It's the sacrament of baptism. We may personally believe we'll see you in heaven. But our public affirmation of your profession depends on your willingness to profess your faith in the way Scripture requires, starting with baptism.

In other words, Christ has done more than call us to publicly judge who is or is not part of the body of Christ. He has tied our public judgment to the sacraments. If you have not professed your faith and had your profession affirmed in the way the Lord of the church requires, namely, through baptism and membership in a local church, then we cannot act like you are a member of his body. And we must not encourage you or the world to believe you are a member of Christ's body by inviting you to eat at the Lord's table.

Again, the whole point is that coming to the table is not an exclusively individual decision. It's also a corporate decision requiring a corporate affirmation of faith in the ways God has prescribed.

### **3) HOW SHOULD WE CELEBRATE THE SUPPER?**

At least three attitudes characterize the kind of celebration Paul commends in 1 Corinthians 11.

## A) With love

Love means we help one another to eat and drink in a worthy manner (verse 27). We help people to examine themselves (verse 28). We help people to discern their relationship with Christ's body (verse 29). Which means we clearly explain who should and should not participate in the Lord's Supper. The church has historically called this pastoral labor "Fencing the table."

For as long as I can remember, we've essentially fenced the table at KingsWay by saying, "If you believe you're a Christian, you're welcome to participate." We've stopped short of what 1 Corinthians 5, 10, and 11 require – that all who participate in the Supper must be a member in good standing of a local church that preaches the gospel, which means believers whose profession of faith has been publicly affirmed through baptism.

By not mentioning church membership as a requirement, I think we unintentionally reinforced the very American assumption that communion is about me and Jesus, not my relationship to his body, the church. As we've studied the topic over the last few years as elders, we've identified four spiritual consequences of not fencing the table more carefully.

**First, we fail to exercise our God-given authority as a church.** If Jesus decided, in the perfection of his wisdom, that it's our job to affirm and deny professions of faith. We must take that responsibility seriously. A "Come one come all" or "If you think you're a Christian, join in" approach to the Supper fails to do what Jesus has called us to do.

Our job is to carefully extend assurance of salvation and carefully withhold assurance of salvation. And God has told us how to do it in his Word. Baptize and share the Supper with genuine believers. Do not baptize and or share the Supper with anyone else. If we're not using the biblical criteria the Lord has given us, we're misusing our authority.

**Second, we give people a false assurance of salvation.** Brothers and sisters, so many people come into this room on Sunday morning thinking they are Christians, thinking they are good with God, but they're not. They simply grew up in a Christian family, believe God exists, or think of themselves as a decent person. They don't understand the gospel and have not responded to the gospel with repentance and faith.

I've watched them come forward and share in communion, trembling at the thought that they were drinking judgment on themselves. It's simply not loving to say that's between them and God. Will they answer to God? Absolutely. But they must be courageously warned, not falsely comforted. Woe to us if we proclaim peace when there



is no peace. The attitude that says, “I know I’m a Christian. Your job is to make me feel welcome!” is the very sort of pride that leads away from God, not toward him.

**Third, we incur judgment on ourselves and lead others toward the same.** Paul wasn’t kidding when he warned in 1 Corinthians 11:30, “That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.” He drew a straight line between people who thought they were Christians (but were not genuine believers) participating in the Supper and suffering the consequences of physical disease and death. It was an expression of God’s righteous judgment.

Denigrating the gospel – proclaiming fellowship with Christ and his people by eating the Supper while denying the same through the pattern of your life – is not a light thing in the eyes of God. It is a serious thing because his reputation is on the line. Helping one another discern the true condition of our relationship to Christ’s body is not optional. It’s a matter of life and death.

**Fourth, we lie about Jesus by softening the offense of the gospel.** Here’s the sober reality. We can doctrinally deny universalism, the idea that in the end, everyone is saved, while functionally encouraging universalism. How do we do that? By making the invitation to the Supper so broad and wide that we stop bearing witness to the truth of the gospel.

Who we welcome and don’t welcome at the table is a God-given opportunity to speak the truth about the Lord of the table. It’s one of the most important ways we declare what it means to have fellowship with God and help those who gather with us on Sunday to participate in a worthy manner. God protects us from lacking the love necessary to fence the table biblically.

## **B) With integrity**

Our corporate responsibility to fence the table doesn’t remove our personal responsibility to soberly examine ourselves before we eat and drink by asking two questions. **First**, “Has Christ’s authorized representative on earth affirmed my profession of faith or not? **Second**, even if I am a member of KingsWay or a baptized member of another church, “Am I still walking the road of repentance? Is there any sin in my life where I’m stubbornly going my own way instead of fighting for godliness?”

I’m not talking about excessive introspection. I’m talking (verse 31) about judging yourself truly by evaluating the spiritual direction of your life, especially the way you’re

handling relationships with other Christians. Are you working for the unity the Supper proclaims? Or are you nursing resentment and bitterness? Eating the bread and drinking the cup will do you no good – and significant harm – if your life doesn't testify to the truth the meal proclaims.

### **C) With joy**

The whole reason Paul is aghast at the Corinthians' behavior is that they were abusing something incredibly precious. Which is why his pastoral goal, and the Lord's heart for us, KingsWay, goes further than correction or teaching them to rightly judge themselves. His aim is genuine repentance, faith in Christ expressed through love for his body, that leads to the joy of salvation!

Look at verse 32. The sickness and death they experienced on account of misusing the Supper were ultimately expressions of the Lord's loving discipline for their church. "But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world." The Father's ultimate goal, Paul knew, wasn't to punish them, but to get their attention that they might be redeemed and restored.

Not being condemned along with the world – that's God's heart for you, friend. He longs to be gracious to you. He rises to show you compassion. He will not be trifled with or stand idly by while we mishandle a meal he created for our good and his glory. But remember this. The Supper is immeasurably more than an identity marker. It's a celebration, a joyful celebration, of all Christ has done for us. This is precisely why it can serve as an identity marker in the first place!

The Supper says Jesus lived for you, Christian. Jesus died for you. Jesus rose for you. And if you're holding fast to him, not only in your own eyes, but in the eyes of your brothers and sisters in your local church, this you know. Romans 8:1, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." You have been forgiven. You have been cleansed. You have been healed. Where your sin abounds, grace abounds all the more.

So listen carefully to me if your struggle is the exact opposite of the Corinthians. You hear Paul speak about honoring Christ by eating and drinking in a worthy manner, and you feel waves of anxiety, waves of condemnation rising in your heart. It's not the gracious conviction of unrepentant sin. It's a creeping sense of unworthiness over the presence of remaining sin.

If that's you, friend, hear the words of Martin Luther's good friend, Philip Melancthon: "Some will not venture to profess Christ until they can profess themselves. They wait for worthiness to come to the Lord's table, not considering that it is unworthiness which they are to profess, along with Christ's worthiness – their sins, along with His name for remission of sins."

What does the Supper remember and celebrate? It's not your worthiness. It's Jesus. The whole point of the meal is that we are unworthy, but he is worthy, and all who by faith are found in him are worthy in him. The beauty of the gospel is that Jesus both invites us to his table and gives us the right clothes to wear – garments of spotless righteousness to all who despair of saving themselves and run to him for mercy.

J.I. Packer wonderfully describes how the Lord's Supper strengthens our assurance. "As surely as I see and touch and taste this bread and this wine, so sure is it that Jesus Christ is not a fancy but a fact, that he is for real, and that he offers me himself to be my Savior, my Bread of Life, my Guide to glory. He has left me this rite, this gesture, this token, this ritual action as a guarantee of this grace."

Oh, my friends! May all who are in Christ Jesus receive this meal with grateful joy. For it is the best meal you will ever eat. There is no better food. There is no better drink. Because no one else can satisfy your soul and give you life like Jesus. So examine yourself, but don't stop there. Look to Christ! Fix your eyes on him and rejoice. You are not worthy. But he is exceedingly worthy, which is why the Supper isn't a scary thing. It's a celebration!

We want to give you time to examine yourself, time to discern the body. Time to wrestle with the biblical principles you've heard today so that all who participate in the Supper may do so in a worthy manner the next time we share communion. You may need to have a conversation with one of our elders. You may need to have a conversation with one of your children. We don't want to rush that or tempt you to violate your conscience by immediately asking you to choose whether you should participate in the Supper or not.

So we are deliberately not going to share communion this morning, as surprising as that may feel at the end of this particular sermon! Instead, we're going to do something that is most appropriate after considering a meal that celebrates our membership in the body of Christ. We're going to welcome 12 new members into KingsWay!

So let's pray and ask for the Spirit's help to examine ourselves this week in preparation for the next time we share the Lord's Supper. And then Josh will lead us in welcoming our new members.