

“Body Unity and the Centrality of Christ in the Local Assembly”  
*Proper Etiquette for Men and Women in Local Church Worship*  
 Issues of Ministry  
 Understanding the Lord’s Table

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 Title: Proper Etiquette for Men and Women in Local Church Worship  
 Text: 1 Corinthians 11:17-22  
 Theme: The body of Christ is built for community.

Introduction:

The Lord’s Table is one of God’s grace gifts to His church. In its symbolism we have the Lord’s death and in its celebration we have portrayed the unity of His people being of one body. Nothing else done by the church can so powerfully do this.

The Lord’s Table communicates many truths and one of them is the idea of community. The idea behind community is that of a fellowship built around things held in common.

It is against this backdrop that we have the setting of the Lord’s Table. Meals are universally seen as a time of relaxation, conversation, solidarity, protection, and family. Meals mark events. They are points in time where people stop and re-connect. They function as memorials, markers, signs. It is of no small coincidence that the Lord’s Table is celebrated as a meal. Many would argue that the Old Testament counterpart to the New Testament Table is the Passover meal. The Passover meal is a memorial celebrating through remembering the nation of Israel’s deliverance from Egyptian bondage. The Lord’s Table is no less powerful. Here His people celebrate through remembrance the church’s deliverance from sin’s bondage.

In our present passage the apostle addresses a problem in the way the Corinthians observed the Lord's Supper. Paul's response unfolds in four sections.

- The criticism of Paul (vv. 17-22)
- The command of Christ (vv. 23-26)
- The consequence of division (vv. 27-32)
- The counsel of Paul (vv. 33, 34)

I believe it is important to note how Paul’s communication is in response to a problem.

ILLUSTRATION:

As I have dialogued with the teachers inside of our fellowship I had one make the following observation concerning the letters of Paul.

“As I've studied Paul for teaching the ABF'S I've developed a high regard for him. We think of him as the great evangelist and the one who through his letters gave structure to the church. However, much of what he wrote was more in his role as God's fireman (We call Paul's letters *occasional* letters. He wrote in response to problems). He was reacting to false teaching and harmful conduct. I am sure he often asked God for relief so that he could concentrate on his heart's desire, to introduce Jews and Gentile to Jesus.”

We, 2000 years later, find doctrine in his letters that were meant to correct wrong teaching and conduct. [This is] a very dicey proposition. It would be similar to someone reviewing all of your conversations and interactions [with relational problems] and deducing your theology from it.”

This is the only time Paul quotes directly from our Lord's words and it is the only time (here and in chapter 10) where he refers to the Lord's Table. And his instruction is in response to the problem. I believe it is legitimate to ask the question, “If the problem had not existed, would Paul have mentioned the Lord's Table?”

Earlier Paul notes how he desired to praise them (v. 2) whereas here his displeasure is immediately felt (v. 17). What a horrible statement to have made concerning a church gathering that somehow it was done in such a way that more harm than good came of it. Every time we meet it is our prayer that you would leave here better than when you came. What a shame if somehow in our preparation more harm to you was done than good.

A key word in verses 17-22 is “come together” or “assemble together.” The idea is that of meeting or gathering. Paul uses the word in verses 17, 18, 20, 33, and 34. Paul's criticism and instruction is directed at the Corinthian fellowship. It is not the Lord's Table that is targeted initially but a fellowship meal that is preceding the celebration of the Lord's Table. It would be like us having a “pot luck” meal followed up with the Lord's Table. Somehow partiality and division was playing a factor in how the “pot luck” was being played out inside the fellowship.

One commentator made the following observation concerning this 1<sup>st</sup> century custom.

“This service was apparently a full meal, with each participant bringing their own food, but eating in a common room. Perhaps predictably enough, it could at times deteriorate into merely an occasion for eating and drinking, or for ostentatious displays by the wealthier members of the community. Because of such abuses, the Agape gradually fell into disfavor, and after being subjected to various regulations and restrictions, it was definitively dropped by the Church between the 6th and 8th centuries.” [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Love\\_feast](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Love_feast)

Thus a custom or tradition that was to reflect and promote the unity of the body around interdependence became a point of separation and division. It was clearly contradicting the work of the cross and the ideas already presented in 11:2-16.

Listen to how it reads in the New Living Translation.

First, is Paul's concern.

<sup>17</sup> But now when I mention this next issue, I cannot praise you. For it sounds as if more harm than good is done when you meet together. <sup>18</sup> First of all, I hear that there are divisions among you when you meet as a church, and to some extent I believe it. <sup>19</sup> But, of course, there must be divisions among you so that those of you who are right will be recognized!

Second, is the issue itself.

<sup>20</sup> It's not the Lord's Supper you are concerned about when you come together. <sup>21</sup> For I am told that some of you hurry to eat your own meal without sharing with others. As a result, some go hungry while others get drunk. <sup>22</sup> What? Is this really true? Don't you have your own homes for eating and drinking? Or do you really want to disgrace the church of God and shame the poor? What am I supposed to say about these things? Do you want me to praise you? Well, I certainly do not!

I find the early church and its practice of the Lord's Table interesting. We perhaps struggle between two extremes. **First**, we want it solemn. We want pageantry and ceremony. Yet this would appear foreign to the way in which the first century church carried out the Lord's Table. **Second**, we want it casual and informal. Yet this too must be tempered with a correct response to remembering why we do what we do. The Lord's Table is a time to reflect on the cross and the consequences of it in the life of His people. It is because of the cross that we can have a meal in common. It is because of the cross that in the body of Christ there is neither male nor female, bond nor free, Jew nor Gentile. This is the power of the cross.

Let us consider the criticism Paul communicates concerning the Corinthian fellowship in verses 17-22.

#### I. The criticism of Paul (vv. 17-22)

Because of their mishandling of the events surrounding the Lord's Table the meaning of the Lord's Table was being directly affected.

There are three criticisms Paul addresses in the Corinthian fellowship.

### A. The church was schismatic (vv. 17-19)

Verses 18-19 repeat the idea of 1 Corinthians 1:10-11 but intensify the accusation. Paul accuses them have having divisions present. He makes this same allegation in 1:10. The word he uses to describe this condition is our English word schismatic or schism. Notice how it is used in the New Testament.

- The word is used for the renting or tearing of a garment (Matt. 9:16; Mark 2:21; Luke 5:36).
- When the temple veil was rent the word used to describe this was schism (Matt. 27:51; Mark 15:38; Luke 23:45).
- When Jesus was baptized by John the heavens are said to have been rent opened and the Holy Spirit descended (Mark 1:10).
- It is used of people's opinion concerning Jesus Christ and the polarization of the group (John 7:43; 9:13; 10:19; Acts 14:4; 23:7).
- When the soldiers cast lots for the garment of our Lord, their intent was that the garment should not be rent (John 19:24).
- Paul will argue in 1 Corinthians 12:25 that because we are many members existing in one body there should be no schism or division within the body.

How are we to understand the idea of a schismatic?

"The word schism, from the Greek σχίσμα, schism (from σχίζω, schizo, 'to split'), means a division or a split, usually in an organization. A schismatic is a person who creates or incites schism in an organization or who is a member of a splinter group. Schismatic as an adjective means pertaining to a schism or schisms, or to those ideas, policies, etc. that are thought to lead towards or promote schism."  
[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schism)

Verse 19 forces us to ask the question, "Is division ever right?" Let us begin by noting the word.

The word "factions" or "differences" or "heresies" simply means, "disunity." The book of Acts uses the word to describe those who are identified by a particular party such as Sadducees (Acts 5:17), Pharisees (Acts 15:5; 26:5), "Christians" or Nazarenes (Acts 24:5; 28:22)

In Galatians 5:20 a party spirit that polarizes the people of God is identified as a work of the flesh. Peter identifies some heresy as damnable. Such appears to be a denial of the Lord Jesus Christ and His redemptive activity (2 Pet. 2:1).

Paul, however, appears to be using the idea of division in a positive way in verse 19. He makes a strong statement that factions are, at times, necessary. "The word is often used in the New Testament to represent divine necessity." (John MacArthur, 1 Corinthians, 268). And then he provides the reason why this is so, "in order that those who are genuine or approved may be made known."

Paul addresses this idea in Acts 20 when he makes his appeal to the Elders of Ephesus in Acts 20:28-30.

<sup>28</sup> Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. <sup>29</sup> I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; <sup>30</sup> and **from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.**

He repeats this same idea in 1 Timothy 4:1-3.

<sup>1</sup> But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times **some will fall away from the faith**, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, <sup>2</sup> by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, <sup>3</sup> men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth.

This same idea is found in John's writing in 1 John 2:18 and 19.

<sup>18</sup> Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour. <sup>19</sup> **They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.**

We should not conclude from this that any time someone or a group of people leave that they are unbelievers or that it is demonic, but let us not equally be so over generalizing as to think that it could not be this. The Scripture allows us at least this conclusion as viable.

Listen to the strong words of John MacArthur as he seeks to understand this passage.

"The worldliness and fleshly disobedience of those who caused the divisions would expose and highlight the love, harmony, and spirituality of those who are approved. Church division, ungodly and sinful as it is, nevertheless is used by the Lord to prove the worth of His faithful saints. In the midst of bickering and divisiveness they are separated out as pure gold is from the dross. Evil helps manifest good. Trouble in the church creates a situation in which true spiritual strength, wisdom, and leadership can be manifested.

[He goes on to say.]

Factions are not merely disruptive; they are destructive. Initially they help reveal the strong, spiritual leaders, but when left unchallenged they will undermine any Christian group and are not to be tolerated. By the very fact that he is factious and divisive a person proves his carnality and his unfitness to be a part of the Christian fellowship. It

is necessary that factions appear, but is it not necessary that they be tolerated or allowed to lead to division in the church." (MacArthur, 1 Corinthians, 269).

#### APPLICATION:

In light of Paul's statement to the church of Corinth we need to ask ourselves two questions:

- (1) Am I being divisive and/or disruptive? Have I sought resolution and can I accept the outcome? The issues inside the Corinthian fellowship are perhaps different than ours, but what it is that would cause us to create disharmony within a fellowship?
- (2) Am I participating in disunity and/or what am I doing to promote the unity of the fellowship?
- (3) How do I go about making things right with those I have injured through the spreading of misinformation?

Paul then addresses the selfishness of the fellowship in verses 20 and 21.

#### B. The church was selfish (vv. 20-21)

Verses 20-22 define the problem. When the Corinthians gather to worship it is not really to eat the Lord's Supper. This is the only time the exact expression, "the Lord's Supper," appears in the New Testament.

In verse 20 Paul reminds them that the Table is to be a sign of body unity. The Table speaks of others. It is to be a selfless act. And yet the Local Church was being divided through selfish acts (vv. 20-21).

"It was conduct like this that led to the complete separation between the Love-feast and the Lord's Supper. It was not even a common meal together, not to say a Lord's [Table]. It was a mere grab-game. This one is hungry. Nothing is left for him at the love-feast. Another is drunken. Such disgusting conduct was considered shameful in heathen club suppers. 'Hungry poor meeting intoxicated rich, at what was supposed to be a supper of the Lord.'" (Robertson and Plummer). (A.T. Robertson's NT Word Pictures)

#### APPLICATION:

How have we handled distinctions of race and wealth? Do we make everyone welcome in this fellowship?

In verse 22 their shameful attitude is addressed.

#### C. The church was shameful (v. 22)

Somehow in the manner in which they gathered they were causing people to feel unwelcome and humiliated. In light of this, how do we as a fellowship make those who are different feel accepted? What are we doing to promote community and unity within the WBC fellowship? Their problem was in their unwillingness to share of their possessions with those who had none. There

seems to be a principle of Acts 4 still present where believers inside of a fellowship were assisting each other in times of need.

William Barclay makes the following thought provoking statement.

“A church is no true church if the art of sharing its forgiven. When people wish to keep things to themselves and to their own circle they are not even beginning to be Christian.” (William Barclay, 1 Corinthians, 102).

Listen to the following thought.

APPLICATION/ILLUSTRATION:

How Members of the Symphony Orchestra Viewed Each Other

At a meeting of the American Psychological Association, Jack Lipton, a psychologist at Union College, and R. Scott Bulione, a graduate student at Columbia University, presented their findings on how members of the various sections of 11 major symphony orchestra perceived each other. The percussionists were viewed as insensitive, unintelligent, and hard-of-hearing, yet fun-loving. String players were seen as arrogant, stuffy, and unathletic. The orchestra members overwhelmingly chose “loud” as the primary adjective to describe the brass players. Woodwind players seemed to be held in the highest esteem, described as quiet and meticulous, though a bit egotistical. Interesting findings, to say the least! With such widely divergent personalities and perceptions, how could an orchestra ever come together to make such wonderful music? The answer is simple: regardless of how those musicians view each other, they subordinate their feelings and biases to the leadership of the conductor. Under his guidance, they play beautiful music. (Today in the Word, June 22, 1992)

Friend, are you working for the unity of a fellowship or are you being contentious, do you love the fight, are you built for the communion of the community or do you always see yourself running into the purpose of God in and through His church?

When I find myself in conflict I need the Holy Spirit to speak to me through the word of God. The book of Proverbs offers us many insightful thoughts on a host of topics that many would classify as “practical.” Listen carefully to the following thoughts from Proverbs.

<sup>12</sup> “A worthless person, a wicked man, Is the one who walks with a perverse mouth, <sup>13</sup> Who winks with his eyes, who signals with his feet, Who points with his fingers; <sup>14</sup> Who with perversity in his heart continually devises evil, **Who spreads strife.** <sup>15</sup> Therefore his calamity will come suddenly; Instantly he will be broken and there will be no healing. <sup>16</sup> There are six things which the LORD hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: <sup>17</sup> Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood, <sup>18</sup> A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that run rapidly to evil, <sup>19</sup> **A false witness who utters lies, And one who spreads strife among brothers**” (Prov. 6:12-19).

**“Through insolence comes nothing but strife,** But wisdom is with those who receive counsel” (Prov. 13:10).

**“A hot-tempered man stirs up strife,** But the slow to anger calms a dispute” (Prov. 15:18).

**“A perverse man spreads strife, And a slanderer separates intimate friends”** (Prov. 16:28).

“The beginning of strife is like letting out water, **So abandon the quarrel before it breaks out**” (Prov. 17:14).

**“He who loves transgression loves strife;** He who raises his door seeks destruction” (Prov. 17:19).

<sup>9</sup> “It is better to live in a corner of a roof Than in a house shared with a contentious woman.” <sup>19</sup> “It is better to live in a desert land Than with a contentious and vexing woman” (Prov. 21:9, 19).

**“Drive out the scoffer, and contention will go out, Even strife and dishonor will cease”** (Prov. 22:10).

“It is better to live in a corner of the roof Than in a house shared with a contentious woman” (Prov. 25:24).

**“For lack of wood the fire goes out, And where there is no whisperer, contention quiets down. 21 Like charcoal to hot embers and wood to fire, So is a contentious man to kindle strife. 22 The words of a whisperer are like dainty morsels, And they go down into the innermost parts of the body”** (Prov. 26:20).

**“An arrogant man stirs up strife,** But he who trusts in the LORD will prosper” (Prov. 28:25).

**“An angry man stirs up strife,** And a hot-tempered man abounds in transgression” (Prov. 29:22).

Such proverbial sayings can prove painful, but I must ask myself if I am being contentious when I find myself in conflict with the body of Christ. There is a biblical difference between contending for the faith once delivered and being contentious. The bible calls us to contend for truth, but it never calls us to be contentious. A contentious spirit is brought about by pride and unwillingness to submit under the instruction of one’s teachers.

“Of all places and occasions, those attitudes are most out place at the Lord’s Supper. They grievously profane that holy, beautiful, and unifying ordinance of God.” (MacArthur, 1 Corinthians, 270).

APPLICATION: (What does this look like?)

Our passage deals with body unity and body division. Such a study forces us to ask certain questions. The questions confronting us in this study are simple, “What part am I playing in the unifying of this fellowship around the person and work of Jesus Christ?” There is also a flip side to this application, “What part am I playing in the dividing of this fellowship?”

1. How to have 7 Sundays

Monday	How do I understand contending versus contentious?
Tuesday	What is so important as to risk the unity of the body?
Wednesday	What am I doing to promote the unity of the body?
Thursday	What do I need to repent of to restore relationships inside the body?
Friday	Am I preparing myself for the gathering of God’s people?
Saturday	Do I look with anticipation at the fellowship with God’s people?

2. How have I applied (or can I apply) this passage to my life?

What do I need to repent of?  
What do I need to promote?

3. How would a man, woman, married, single, youth, senior, seeker, etc., apply it?

Am I seeking to promote body unity trans-generational?

4. Can I give them a “take-home” application – something they can do at home, work or at school?

How am I viewed by others within the fellowship? Do I have a contentious spirit or am I gracious in my communication?

5. How can I show them how to do it?

Am I showing my love for the body through the promotion of unity?

6. Have I kept Christ in the application?

You will never have a unified fellowship in the absence of Christ’s sufficiency. If this is about you, then all hope of unifying the fellowship is lost. If this is about Him, then unity is present.

## The Gospel presented

For the truth of Scripture to change your life through renewing your mind you must be in a right relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ His Son. This relationship is built around four key ideas. They can be summed up in four words: God, man, Christ, and response.

### GOD

God is our holy Creator and righteous Judge. He created us to glorify Him and enjoy Him forever (Gen. 2:7; 16-17; 18:25; Matt. 25:31-33).

### MAN – RECOGNIZE

But *mankind* has rebelled against God by sinning against His holy character and law (Gen. 3:1-7). We've all participated in this sinful rebellion, both in Adam as our representative head and in our own individual actions (1 Kings 8:46; Rom. 3:23; 5:12, 19; Eph. 2:1-3). As a result, we have alienated ourselves from God and have exposed ourselves to His righteous wrath, which will banish us eternally to hell if we are not forgiven (Eph. 2:12; John 3:36; Rom. 1:18; Matt. 13:50).

### CHRIST – REALIZE

But God sent Jesus *Christ*, fully God and fully man, to die the death that we deserved for our sins – the righteous for the unrighteous – so that God might both punish our sin in Christ and forgive it in us (John 1:14; Rom. 3:21-26; 5:6-8; Eph. 2:4-6).

### RESPONSE – RECEIVE

The only saving *response* to this Good News is repentance and belief (Matt. 3:2; 4:17; Mark 1:15; Luke 3:7-9; John 20:31). We must repent of our sins (turn from them and to God) and believe in Jesus Christ for forgiveness of our sins and reconciliation to God.

Have you repented of your sin and turned to Jesus Christ as your only hope of eternal life? Today this can happen to you?