

REMEMBERING THE SACRIFICE

Believers are to approach remembrances of Jesus' death with reverence and unity.

1 CORINTHIANS 11:17-29

MEMORY VERSE: 1 CORINTHIANS 11:26

- **READ** 1 Corinthians 11:2-34, First Thoughts (p. 64), and Understand the Context (pp. 64–65). Pay close attention to specific details Paul used when rebuking and offering correction to the Corinthians.
- **STUDY** 1 Corinthians 11:17-29, using Explore the Text (pp. 65–69). Notice how Paul did not simply rebuke the Corinthians' actions without offering truth to help them recover a right focus on the Lord's Supper. For further insight, consult the *Explore The Bible Adult Commentary* (available in print and digital format from LifeWay.com).
- **PLAN** the group time using the ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 70–71). Tailor the plans for your group using More Ideas (p. 72) ideas online at Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible/Adults/LeaderExtras. Consider how to emphasize this session's memory verse (1 Cor. 11:26).
- **GROW** with other group leaders at the Groups Ministry blog (LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry).
- **GATHER** the following items: Personal Study Guides; and Pens or pencils for each person. Make copies of: **PACK ITEM 9** (*Handout: References to the Lord's Supper*); **PACK ITEM 10** (*Handout: Resurrection Appearances in Scripture*); and **PACK ITEM 12** (*Handout: Problems in Corinth*). Prepare to display the following Pack Item: **PACK ITEM 4** (*Poster: Problems in Corinth*). For More Ideas (p. 72): A piece of string.



KEY DOCTRINE

Lord's Supper

The Lord's Supper is a symbolic act of obedience whereby members of the church, through partaking of the bread and the fruit of the vine, memorialize the death of the Redeemer and anticipate His second coming.

BIBLE SKILL

Read, reflect on, and react emotionally to a Bible text.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:26-27 aloud several times. Each time, emphasize different words. For example, in one reading emphasize "bread" and "cup" each time they appear. Then read the text again, emphasizing all the action words. Take note of your thoughts. How do these verses move you emotionally? What feelings were evoked by the different words and phrases as you emphasized them?

FIRST THOUGHTS

Memorials are often created following major events, such as the USS *Arizona* Memorial in Pearl Harbor. These are solemn places that cause us to reflect on life and our purposes on this earth. There are also happier kinds of memorials, such as the birthplace of a president or a war hero's statue in a city park. Perhaps you have a personal memory that you've memorialized so that you and others won't forget.

(In PSG, p. 55) **What memorial places are special to you? What makes that place special or significant?**

The Bible notes several examples of memorial places or events. The Israelites gathered twelve stones from the Jordan River to set up a permanent marker of their miraculous crossing into the promised land. The annual Passover meal was a way to remember the Lord's spectacular deliverance of His people from Egypt. Jesus took the occasion of eating the Passover with His disciples to establish a new memorial, the Lord's Supper. In this week's lesson, we'll look at what Paul taught the believers in Corinth concerning the right way—and the wrong way—to remember Jesus' death through the Lord's Supper.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

1 CORINTHIANS 11:2-34

We have observed that Paul began his letter by looking at two problems in the church: divisions and immorality. Then he went on to answer some questions sent by the Corinthians. They had asked him about issues such as marriage and food offered to idols, which he answered in some detail.

As we consider 1 Corinthians 11, Paul's concern was to answer questions about public worship. Two matters needed clarification. First was the matter of head coverings in worship (vv. 2-16). Paul was well aware of the cultural expectations of his day, in which men and women dressed very differently from each other. His main point was that each gender should dress appropriately. Believers were to dress (and care for their hair) in ways demonstrating that both genders respected each other. They were to take care that the Lord was honored in the way they dressed when they gathered for worship.

Second was the matter of the Lord's Supper, the focus for this week's study (vv. 17-34). As we will see, Paul criticized the believers for allowing their divisions to be on display in the way they were behaving when they celebrated the Lord's Supper. He reminded them that the essential information about the Lord's Supper had been "received" from the Lord Himself. Then Paul

challenged them to examine themselves in preparation for sharing together in this act of Christian worship. Paul's teaching in these verses is the only passage in the epistles to provide specific directions regarding the right way for believers to remember Jesus' sacrifice through the Supper. Otherwise, we are dependent on the accounts in Matthew, Mark, and Luke that describe the historical origin of this ordinance as Jesus instituted it.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

WITH WORSHIP (1 COR. 11:17-22)

VERSES 17-18

Paul moved on from his previous topic of head coverings by using the transitional phrase, *in the following instructions*. The verb he used is strong, so the phrase could well be translated "commanding you this." The apostle struck a serious tone, letting the believers know up front that he wrote not to praise them but rather the opposite: to rebuke.

Not until verse 20 did Paul specifically reference the Lord's Supper. Here he let them know that what should have been an act of glorifying the Lord had become a disruption. Their gathering was leaving them worse off, not better off. By using the verb, *I hear*, the apostle was moving from matters about which the Corinthians had written to him back to what he had learned in an oral report (1:11; 5:1; 7:1). What troubled him was that their manner of coming together reflected deep *divisions among* them. These divisions were different than the cliques Paul had condemned earlier, based on which human leader people were following. The divisions he had in mind now were economically based: well-to-do versus poor.

VERSE 19

Paul's comment here—almost an aside—provides a theological framework for what was happening in the congregation: *there must be factions among you*. He meant that God, in His providence, allows controversy in a church. Why? So that members can come to recognize which teachings (and teachers) are shoddy and which ones are *genuine* (the term suggests the idea of passing a test). God can use congregational troubles as a test, and eventually those who are in the right will be recognized.

VERSE 20

Paul returned to the specific topic at hand: *the Lord's supper*. This verse stands out as the only place in the entire New Testament that uses this name for the great Christian ordinance. We might assume the term is used frequently in the Bible, but not so. Several things may be noted:

- The adjective translated *Lord's* stresses a close connection to the Lord Jesus.
- The main idea may be "the supper belonging to (or hosted by) the Lord."
- The main idea may be "the supper ordained by the Lord."

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read "The Lord's Supper and the Love Feast" in the Spring 2018 issue of Biblical Illustrator. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

1 CORINTHIANS 11:17-20

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. 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. ²⁰ When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat.

- The main idea may be “the supper at which the Lord’s ‘body’ and ‘blood’ are shared.”

Paul’s point was that when the Corinthians came together, what they were doing was so disgraceful that it had taken on sordid character. The Lord no longer had anything to do with it, even if the Corinthians thought they were honoring Him.

1 CORINTHIANS 11:21

²¹ For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk.

VERSE 21

We are accustomed to participating in the Supper as a token meal, with a pinch of bread and a small sip of juice. The Corinthians were evidently partaking in the Supper at the end of an early version of the church potluck (see the reference to love feasts in 2 Pet. 2:13; Jude 12). It had evolved into a strange supper in which each person or family was bringing their own food and eating only what they had brought. They weren’t sharing. The occasion had become for each person merely *his own supper*. There was no true Christian fellowship and therefore it was not really the Lord’s Supper.

Apparently the wealthy brought in a veritable banquet, including plenty of wine, and they proceeded to chow down and drink too much. The poor, likely including slaves, couldn’t afford to bring any food, and they went *hungry*. The wealthy were eating ahead of others. In no way could what was happening be called a shared meal.

1 CORINTHIANS 11:22

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? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.

VERSE 22

Paul asked a string of questions, essentially to get the Corinthians to realize the evil they were doing, before he offered a corrective. His first question requires an obvious yes: homes are the normal place to eat and drink in. The implication was “if that’s what you’re doing at the Lord’s Supper, then stay home.” The church is no place to discriminate between economic classes (see Jas. 2:1-26).

The second question was meant to shame the wealthy by showing that what they were doing was (1) despising what the church of God is—the family of God’s people and (2) embarrassing those who have nothing—the poor. God has called people from all economic classes to be His people, and those who mistreat the poor deserve God’s judgment.

Paul next asked whether the Corinthians thought he should *commend* them for such behavior. Here, he answered the question directly: **No, I will not.** With this response he explained what he had asserted at the beginning of the paragraph, “I do not commend you” (11:17).

(In PSG, p. 58) **What are some ways a religious observance can become misguided? What factors contribute to the observance becoming misguided? What can be done to keep the focus of a religious practice on God and His purposes?**

WITH REMEMBRANCE (1 COR. 11:23-26)

VERSES 23-24

Almost all Bible students believe this is the earliest written account of the institution of the Lord's Supper, preceding the composition of the Gospel accounts by at least several years. Further, this is one of the few incidents in Jesus' life that Paul described in detail.

In their debasing of the Supper, the Corinthians had forgotten what Paul had earlier taught them. When the apostle wrote that he had **delivered** what he **received from the Lord**, it is uncertain whether he meant that the Lord had given him this information by direct revelation. He may well have learned this teaching indirectly through other apostles such as Peter (Gal. 1:18). In either case he was confident of the facts. Paul briefly set the context for the first Lord's Supper as occurring **on the night when he was betrayed**. There is irony and poignancy that the ritual which recalls Jesus' sacrificial love was established at the same time that human hate was about to betray Him to His enemies.

The sequence of verbs is beautifully expressed: **took**, gave **thanks**, **broke**, and **said**. (Compare with Matt. 26:26: took, blessed, broke, gave, and said.) The thanksgiving or blessing was the usual way for Jews to begin a meal, but this blessing actually occurred during supper. The breaking of the bread (probably a whole loaf) occurred essentially so that it could be distributed, rather than to emphasize the brokenness of His body in the crucifixion (see John 19:36). Each phrase of Jesus' own words is weighty.

- **This is my body.** Although Christian thinkers through the centuries have argued about the precise meaning of these words, it's best to understand Jesus as saying, "This bread means My body" or "This bread represents My body." His actual, physical body was at that moment still present with the disciples in the room of the last supper.
- **Which is for you.** There was a purpose for His suffering and death. He died on behalf of others. His suffering atoned for the sins of those who place their trust in Him.
- **Do this ... in remembrance of me.** Our Lord ordained that His followers are to remember His death by eating the bread and drinking the cup. Jesus instituted this observance at a Passover meal, which commemorated the Israelites' exodus (Ex. 12:14-27).

VERSE 25

Next Paul turned his attention to **the cup**. He provided an abbreviated sequence of verbs, mentioning only **took ... saying**. The words establish a parallel between the bread and the cup. (See Matt. 26:27 for the sequence took, gave thanks, gave, and said.) Again, each phrase is significant.

- **This cup is the new covenant.** Long ago, the prophet Jeremiah had looked forward to the time when God would establish a new, better covenant with His people (Jer. 31:31-34). The old covenant was the Mosaic covenant. Jesus declared that the new covenant had arrived in His person and death.

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-24

²³ 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, ²⁴ 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."

1 CORINTHIANS 11:25

²⁵ In the same way also 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."

- ***In My blood.*** The reference, of course, is to our Lord's upcoming death. Throughout the New Testament, "blood" is used to refer to Jesus' sacrificial death. The contents of the cup represented His blood, just as the bread represented His body. His actual, literal blood was still coursing through His body even as He established the ordinance.
- ***Do this ... in remembrance of me.*** These words are identical to His command about the bread.
- ***As often as you drink it.*** Jesus did not specify any frequency for the Lord's Supper. *As often as* means "whenever." The Passover was remembered by Jews once a year. In the Book of Acts, there is evidence for a weekly Lord's Supper by Christians, if the references to breaking bread mean the Lord's Supper (2:42,46; 20:7,11).

The Lord's Supper is a visible gospel presentation.

1 CORINTHIANS 11:26

²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

VERSE 26

Not only do we look back to Jesus' death in the Lord's Supper, we look forward to His return (***until he comes***). Whenever we eat this bread and drink the cup, the death of Jesus is declared. The verb translated ***proclaim*** occurs in several New Testament verses to describe the witness of believers to unbelievers (see 1 Cor. 9:14; Phil. 1:17; Col. 1:28). When we partake of the Lord's Supper in worship and in remembrance, we are announcing to those outside the fellowship of the church that the only way of salvation is by the Lord's death. The Lord's Supper is a visible gospel presentation.

**In what sense is the Lord's Supper a visible gospel presentation?
What are some practical ways we can prepare ourselves to take the Lord's Supper?**

1 CORINTHIANS 11:27

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.

WITH EXAMINATION (1 COR. 11:27-29)

VERSE 27

Paul drew a practical conclusion about the way the Lord's Supper is to be taken. Note that no person is actually worthy of partaking of the Supper. None of us deserves the goodness of the Lord. Yet in another sense, we come worthily when we come as Christ has invited us to come: in faith, in remembrance of His death, and with respect for what the Lord's Supper stands for.

In the original situation in Corinth, eating and drinking ***in an unworthy manner*** had been a matter of dishonoring the poor of the church, indicated by the gluttony and drunkenness of some wealthy members when they gathered as a church. There are surely other ways in which the

Lord's Supper can be observed in an unworthy manner. Anytime we focus only on ourselves rather than on others when we gather to remember the death of Jesus, we are doing so in a way that the Lord detests.

This is a very serious offense, which Paul described as **guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord**. He meant that they were behaving in a way contrary to the purpose for which Christ gave up His body and blood: to provide salvation for all who believe, whatever their economic status. When rich Christians discriminated against poor Christians at the Lord's Supper, they were sinning against those for whom Jesus died. They were sinning against Christ Himself.

VERSE 28

To avoid a serious offense at the Lord's Supper, all believers should regularly **examine** themselves. We are to consider our motives as we approach our observance. Such self-examination should occur before participating in eating the bread and drinking the cup. Paul did not mean that the Supper is mainly a matter of introspection, with believers mainly focusing on their own lives. He had already made it clear that the Lord's Supper is a celebration of Christ's redemptive work, the unity of the church, and the proclamation of the gospel. It is only as we intentionally prepare that we are to focus our attention.

The Lord's Supper is not to be entered into flippantly.

VERSE 29

Bible students have understood the phrase **without discerning the body** in one of two ways. Some think Paul meant, "not understanding that the bread of the Supper represents Christ's body given sacrificially for us." Others, noting that Paul did not mention the cup, think that he was referring to the church as Christ's body (12:12-27). On this view, Paul meant, "not understanding that believers, when they gather, are a single body—the body of Christ." In either case, this dishonors Christ. **Eats and drinks judgment on himself** stands as a sober warning that the Lord will discipline those who disrespect His Supper. The Lord's Supper is not to be entered into flippantly.

What are some errors we might make regarding the taking of the Lord's Supper?

1 CORINTHIANS 11:28

²⁸ Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

1 CORINTHIANS 11:29

²⁹ For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.

LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

GET STARTED: Prior to the group's arrival, list on a whiteboard or sheet of paper several memorials or monuments in your area. These may include statues or buildings named for events or people. As the group arrives, point to the list of memorials and ask volunteers to name other memorials they have visited. Add those to the list.

DISCUSS: After most have arrived, explain that on-site memorials often are created following a major event, such as a battle, war, or birth of a famous person. Use the information from your study of First Thoughts (p. 64) to share additional examples of United States and biblical memorials. Ask: *What memorial places are special to you? What makes that place special or significant?* (PSG, p. 55)

TRANSITION: *Jesus took the occasion of eating the Passover with His disciples to establish a new memorial, the Lord's Supper. In this week's study, we'll look at what Paul taught the believers in Corinth about the right way—and the wrong way—to remember Jesus' death through the Lord's Supper.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

GUIDE: Point out **Pack Item 4** (*Poster: Problems in Corinth*) and comment that Paul continued to give practical instruction concerning church matters in 1 Corinthians 11-14, especially in relation to aspects of corporate worship. Direct attention to the "Propriety in Church Worship" on **Pack Item 12** (*Handout: Problems in Corinth*). Call on someone to read the section "The Lord's Supper" as a summary introduction for this session's study.

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud 1 Corinthians 11:17-22, as the rest of the group listens for how Paul described divisions within the church.

DISCUSS: *What was the major problem Paul addressed in these verses?*

EXPLAIN: *The intention of the church, of course, was to observe the Lord's Supper as they met together—and Paul had every expectation they would follow his instructions. But instead, at the meal, each one ate ... without regard to other believers. Unlike the observance of many churches today, where the Lord's Supper is part of a corporate worship service, the Corinthian believers included the Lord's Supper as part of a meal they would eat together.* (PSG, p. 58)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Matthew 26:26 and Mark 14:22, where Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper "as they were eating." Call attention to **Pack Item 9** (*Handout: References to the Lord's Supper*). Direct the group to scan the information on the handout to enhance understanding of the Lord's Supper.

DISCUSS: *What are some ways a religious observance can become misguided? What factors contribute to the observance becoming misguided? What can be done to keep the focus of a religious practice on God and His purposes?* (PSG, p. 58)

TRANSITION: *Paul did not simply rebuke the Corinthians' actions without offering truth to help them recover a right focus on the Lord's Supper.*

READ: Read aloud 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, calling for the group to listen for the way Paul re-focused the Corinthians on the meaning of the Lord's Supper.

DISCUSS: *How did Paul's use of the plural "you" in these verses confront the selfish individualism of the Corinthians that Paul was addressing?* (PSG, p. 60)

DEFINE: Lead the group to locate the elements of the Lord's Supper in this passage (bread and cup). Review the comments under Verses 23-24 in the PSG (pp. 59–60) to help the group better understand the significance of the bread and the cup.

EXPLAIN: Use information in the last paragraph under Verses 25-26 (PSG, p. 60) to explain that when believers observe the Lord's Supper, they are remembering and proclaiming the Lord's death until He returns. Point out that 1 Corinthians 11:26 is the memory verse for this week.

DISCUSS: *How can the Lord's Supper be a means of sharing the gospel with others? How does observing the Lord's Supper give a believer confidence in his or her salvation?* (PSG, p. 60)

STUDY: Lead the group to complete the Bible Skill in the PSG (p. 61). Invite volunteers to share responses to the questions.

TRANSITION: *After recalling Jesus' Last Supper, Paul returned to instructions for the Corinthians.*

READ: Direct someone to read 1 Corinthians 11:27-29, as the remainder of the group notes how Paul guided the Corinthian believers to examine their motives for observing the Lord's Supper.

CLARIFY: Use information in the first paragraph under Verses 27-29 (PSG, p. 61) to help explain what Paul meant by being unworthy to take the Lord's Supper. Stress that believers are to be invited to humbly participate in the observance of the Lord's Supper.

DISCUSS: *How might a person approach the Lord's Supper in "an unworthy manner"? What might one do to properly prepare to observe the Lord's Supper?* (PSG, p. 62)

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

REVIEW: Lead in a review of the bulleted statements under In My Context (PSG, p. 63). Invite individuals to pick the statement that best describes the biggest insight gained during the session.

CHALLENGE: Lead the group to answer the second question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 63): *As a group, list different ways that the Lord's Supper can be taken in a worship setting. Discuss as a group ways group members can encourage one another to participate in the Lord's Supper in a proper way.*

PRAY: Close in prayer, asking God to guide the group in observing the Lord's Supper with worship, remembrance, and examination.



PRACTICE

- Reflect on the last time you observed the Lord's Supper. Ask God to help you apply truths from this study to future Lord's Supper observances.
- Mark on your calendar the next date of the Lord's Supper observance at your church (obtain date from your church office). Make a note to contact the group prior to the observance, reminding them of this session and your discussion.
- Pray for your church. Perhaps, like the Corinthian believers, you have strayed from Christ's intent and have unhelpful or destructive aspects of your church life. Ask God to lead and guide in moving your congregation back on track.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

To replace the Focus Attention idea, display a piece of string wrapped around your finger. Comment that string is an age-old custom to help remember something. Lead participants to name other ways of remembering (examples: taking photos, making videos, writing in a journal). Direct attention to the session title (PSG, p. 55).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To supplement the discussion of 1 Corinthians 11:17-22, invite the group to imagine that Paul was writing a letter to your church about your observance of the Lord's Supper. Discuss what Paul might say to your congregation.
- To enhance the discussion of 1 Corinthians 11:23-26, lead in a time of reflection on how believers should prepare for observing the Lord's Supper. Call on a volunteer to read **Pack Item 10** (*Handout: Resurrection Appearances in Scripture*). Then ask: *What role does remembering the hope of Jesus' resurrection have in our preparation? How can contemplating the experiences of those who saw the risen Jesus draw us to a more personal observation of the Lord's Supper? How can believers keep remembrance of Christ's sacrifice fresh for each observance?*
- To supplement the study of 1 Corinthians 11:27-29, before the session, collect future calendar dates from the church office for observing the Lord's Supper. Share these dates with your group and suggest that they write them somewhere prominent as a reminder of self-examination before observing the Lord's Supper.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Direct attention to the Key Doctrine on page 59 of the PSG. Guide the group to determine how the doctrinal statement relates to 1 Corinthians 11:17-22. Call for ways their understanding of the Lord's Supper has been enhanced by this study.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

Invite group to name hymns and praise songs they associate with observance of the Lord's Supper. Select one of these to sing as a group or play a recording of "In Remembrance of Me," by Robert Kochis.