



THE CROSS AND THE CHRISTIAN GATHERING

1 Corinthians 11:2-34

If you have Bible, and I hope you do, turn with me to 1 Corinthians 11. As you're turning to 1 Corinthians 11, I want to ask you a question. Is what we do in this room unique? Or what about when we gather together in small groups, most of which meet in our homes: Is there anything distinct about what happens there? When followers of Jesus come together, what makes that gathering different from any other gathering of any other type of people? Do we dress a certain way? Do we act a certain way? Do we talk a certain way? Do we eat a certain way? Does the cross of Christ uniquely affect what happens when Christians gather?

I think it does, and I want to show you today some of those ways in God's Word. As I do, I want us to consider: Do our gatherings reflect these distinctions? For us to think about in this room, for you to think about in your small group: Are these distinctions present among us? And even, are these distinctions evident to non-Christians who are visiting here today or who may visit your small group?

The last couple of weeks we've talked about eating and drinking and playing and working to the glory of God, so the question this morning is, "How do we gather for the glory of God?" How is our time as the church together informed by the gospel? And how can our time as the church together best display the gospel? These are questions that Paul begins to address in 1 Corinthians 11. Right after saying that everything we do should be done to God's glory, Paul begins to describe ways the church at Corinth was not living for God's glory. He specifically addresses some of the things that were taking place when the church gathered together.

Characteristics of Christian Gatherings...

I want us to read this chapter, and then I want us to think together about five characteristics of Christian gatherings. Not that these are the only five, but clearly these were five characteristics that the church at Corinth needed to be reminded of, and I'm convinced we need to be reminded of them today. Let's read 1 Corinthians 11, starting in verse 2. I'll go ahead and warn you, the first part of this chapter is quite the zinger to preach from. Read along with me.

Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you. But I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God. Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head, but every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, since it is the same as if her head were shaven. For if a wife will not cover her head, then she should cut her hair

short. But since it is disgraceful for a wife to cut off her hair or shave her head, let her cover her head. For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man. For man was not made from woman, but woman from man. Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman. And all things are from God. Judge for yourselves: is it proper for a wife to pray to God with her head uncovered? Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair it is a disgrace for him, but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory? For her hair is given to her for a covering. If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God.

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. 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, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. 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.

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

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. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another—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. (1 Corinthians 11:2-34)

What makes this chapter particularly challenging (and in some sense what makes all Bible study particularly challenging) is that we're almost 2000 years removed from the original context in which this letter was written. We don't know all the details about the culture at Corinth—what women wore at what times and in what places and why this particular issue

needed to be addressed at this time in this place. If we're not careful, we can get so caught up in speculation and assumption about this or that, that we can lose sight of the clear meaning in the text.

Glad submission to loving authority.

My goal is to cut right to the clear points that Paul's making here because he's talking throughout this chapter about what's happening when the church gathers together. He says to them that the first characteristic that needs to be evident in your gathering (and again, this list is not exhaustive, but it is essential) is glad submission to loving authority. As soon we hear that word "authority" in our day, we immediately think of a negative authoritarianism. We think of all the abuses that are associated with authority. Yet deep down inside, we all know that authority is a good thing, especially loving authority.

For example, it is good for parents to have loving authority in their children's lives. It is good, when my children say they want to eat McDonald's every single day, for me to say, "Nope." It's a good thing for me and for them that I have a place of loving authority in their lives. And the church is intended to be a picture of this: Glad submission to loving authority. When Christians gather, this is evident in different ways.

First, when we gather together, we are all submissive to the Word. Paul begins this whole chapter by commending the Corinthians for maintaining the teaching and traditions that Paul as an apostle had passed down to them. This makes what we're doing in this room this morning very unique. There are a lot of groups gathering together today to talk about all kinds of different things: Sports and entertainment and politics and current events. While they're talking about all these things, we're sitting here talking about women's head coverings in the first century! Does that make us weird, out of touch, antiquated? Some may say yes, but this is part of what's distinct about what happens when Christians gather together. We don't set the agenda for what we talk about; God does. We gather together around His Word, and what He says determines what we talk about and think about and apply to our lives.

This is a very unique thing. We are a people who come together every Sunday to spend concentrated time listening to what God has said in His Word, saying, "Whatever this book says to believe, we will believe. And whatever it says to do, we will do." We gladly submit our lives to God's Word, knowing that it represents God's loving authority over us.

So that's one way that glad submission to loving authority is evident in the Christian gathering, but there are also other ways that Paul talks about here in 1 Corinthians 11. He talks about out how men are specifically submissive to the Lord. Verse 3 says, "*I want you to understand that the head of every man is Christ*" (1 Corinthians 11:3), so men gladly submit to the loving authority of Christ as their head.

As a result of this (now follow this), Paul says in verse 4, "*Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head*" (1 Corinthians 11:4). In other words, every man who prays or prophesies with his physical head covered dishonors his spiritual head, who is Christ. Now again, this is one of those places where we don't have all the information. We don't know why a man covering his head would bring dishonor upon Christ in the culture and the church at Corinth. But we do know that men are specifically submissive to the Lord, and the way they show that submission in the culture at Corinth is by praying or prophesying with their heads uncovered. To pray with their heads covered would be to show a lack of submission to Christ.

The opposite is true for women, and this is where Paul says women are specifically submissive to men. It's not that women aren't submissive to Christ—certainly the rest of Scripture teaches that they are. Paul says here in verse 3, "*The head of a wife is her husband*" (1 Corinthians 11:3). So, the leader, the loving authority in a wife's life is her husband. Then in verse 5 Paul says, "*Every wife who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head,*" (1 Corinthians 11:5), which then leads to the only imperative in the first half of this chapter in verse 6, when he says, "*Let her cover her head*" (1 Corinthians 11:6).

Again, we don't know all the cultural details here, but it's clear that if a wife prays or prophesies with her head uncovered in the culture of Corinth, then she is clearly dishonoring her husband. The other alternative, Paul says, would be for her to shave her head, but that too would be disgraceful. Paul's point is: When you gather together as a church, and a woman is praying or prophesying, she needs to do so in a way that honors her husband as a loving authority in her life. The way she does that culturally is by covering her head. That's the whole point of the first half of 1 Corinthians 11.

Paul knows that people in Corinth in the first century and God knows that people in our culture in the twenty-first century may balk at this. "What? The head of a wife is her husband? Is that not chauvinistic, even arrogant? That a wife does not have equal right to uncover her head in praying or prophesying just like her husband does?"

Paul pauses and goes back to the beginning of creation. Paul says in verse 8: "*For man was not made from woman, but woman from man*" (1 Corinthians 11:8). Paul says, "Look at God's order in creation." Very simply, man was created first, and then woman was created. That may not seem like a huge deal, maybe just coincidence, but that's not the case at all. Obviously, Adam and Eve could have been created at the exact same time. In the creation of animals, which are also male and female, you don't have this kind of differentiation, but way back in Genesis 2, there is a distinct order.

This is not the only place in God's Word that points to that order as significant. First Timothy 2:12-13, talking about men's and women's leadership in the church, the Bible says, "*For Adam was formed first, then Eve.*" First Timothy teaches that is a basis for male leadership in the church. According to God's Word, this order has significant theological meaning. God's creation of man first was not just arbitrary or some divine flipping of the coin: "Okay, we'll go with man." There's significance to it.

Similarly, the Bible says look at God's design in creation. Paul goes on to say in verse 9: "*Neither was man created for woman, but woman for man*" (1 Corinthians 11:9). All Paul is doing here is pointing back to Genesis 2 when God said it was not good for man to be alone because he needed a helper suitable to him, like him, made in the image of God, but different from him, literally as a "helper" to him. That word "helper" is used twice to describe woman in Genesis 2.

God created man and woman with unique design, different from one another, man as head and woman as helper, and God did this for a reason. It's a reason that Paul has already pointed out in the beginning of this chapter when he said in verse 3 that "*the head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and head of Christ is God*" (1 Corinthians 11:3). Paul is saying that this picture of glad submission to loving authority didn't just begin at creation. It's actually based upon the very nature of God. God has created man as head and woman as helper as a picture of loving authority and glad submission because this describes the very nature of God.

Think about who God is. The Bible clearly teaches that there is one God, and He is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The mystery of the Trinity. One God, three persons. We know that the persons of the Trinity are equally divine. The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Spirit is God. All three persons of the Trinity are equally divine and equally worthy of glory. None are higher than the other in worth.

At the same time, though, the persons of the Trinity are positionally different. They have different roles and even different authority, which is what Paul is saying in verse 3. "*The head of Christ is God*" (1 Corinthians 11:3). In other words, Christ—the Son—is gladly submissive to the loving authority of the Father. Jesus says in John 4, "*My [will] ... is to do the will of the one who sent me*" (John 4:34). Now is that offensive to the Son? Is that chauvinistic of the Father? This is loving authority and glad submission in beautiful relationship. This is the gospel!

This is what the cross of Christ is all about. Jesus gladly submitting Himself in the Garden of Gethsemane to the will of the Father to endure the wrath due your sin and my sin by sacrificing Himself on a cross. Because of His glad submission, we have eternal salvation. The idea of headship and submission did not begin with Paul, and it is not still alive today because of preachers like me. The idea of headship and submission never even began; it has always been because God has always been. And it has always been good.

Now it has been distorted in so many ways, distorted as a result of sin, but that doesn't mean we throw out God's good design—in marriage or in the church. One writer put it this way, based upon the nature of God:

We can say then that a relationship of authority and submission between equals, with mutual giving of honor, is the most fundamental and most glorious interpersonal relationship in the universe. Such a relationship allows interpersonal differences without "better" or "worse," without "more important" and "less important." And when we begin to dislike the very idea of authority and submission—not distortions and abuses, but the very idea—we are tampering with something very deep. We are beginning to dislike God Himself.

Paul says women are specifically submissive to men going all the way back to creation, based on the nature of God, and then, he says, in verse 10, because of the angels. First Corinthians 11:10, "*That is why a wife ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels*" (1 Corinthians 11:10). Some of you read that and you think, "What in the world does that mean?" If you think that, I want you to know that you are not alone. I don't have a clue what in the world that means. No clue.

I have read, researched, studied, and just about every person I have read, researched, and studied says something completely different. I thought about not putting it in your notes and just hoping you wouldn't notice that I skipped over verse 10, but I know it's in here for a reason, and apparently this helped bolster Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 11. Believing that this somehow strengthens the truth that women are submissive to men in the church, I'm saying to you today, "It's all because of the angels," but I have no clue what that means.

What I do know is that a clear characteristic of Christian gatherings is glad submission to loving authority. We need to be intentional, particularly in a day when submission and authority are seen as such negative concepts, where gender distinctions are denied and

disregarded at every turn. We need to be intentional to show one another and a watching world what glad submission to loving authority.

Godly understanding of gender mutuality.

We must be careful not to take these ideas of submission and authority too far to the point where we do abuse them, so a second characteristic of a Christian gathering is a godly understanding of gender mutuality. Paul, realizing that such was abuse was possible, immediately says in verse 11, *"Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man nor man of woman; for as woman was made from man, so man is now born of woman"* (1 Corinthians 11:11). In other words, men, lest you think this is all about you, don't forget: You wouldn't be here if it wasn't for woman! The clear picture is one of men and women needing each other, mutually interdependent.

What Paul's emphasizing here is that we complement one another as man and woman. We complement one another as husbands and wives in marriage, and we complement one another as men and women in the church.

We serve each other alongside each other as men and women who have equal value. Do not make the mistake of assuming that submission means women are somehow inferior to men—that is not what Scripture is teaching at all. Even verse 7 can be misunderstood when Paul says man *"is the image and glory of God, but woman is the glory of man"* (1 Corinthians 11:7). You might read that and think, particularly as a woman, "Well, does this mean that I'm not made in the image of God or that I don't reflect the glory of God?" That's not at all what that means. First of all, you'll notice that word "image" is not repeated in the second clause, and we know from the beginning of the Bible, Genesis 1:27, that God created both male and female in His image with equal dignity, both uniquely reflecting His glory. But that's just it. We reflect His glory in unique ways as men and women.

So men and women have equal value, but men and women have unique roles, which is what Paul's hitting at here. Think about it: How does a husband reflect the glory of God? Through loving leadership as the head of his wife. How does a wife reflect the glory of God? Through glad submission as the helper to her husband. In marriage and then in church, Paul says, men and women have equal value, but they have unique roles, roles that complement one another.

This is key. This is where we realize that we don't minimize our differences; we celebrate our differences. This is not Paul, this is not us, saying to each other in the church, "Well, women, you're just helpers. Men, you're the head. Whether you like it or not, that's the lot that's fallen to you." No, this is good. This is good for all of us. It's really good that we're not all like each other. It's really good that there are fundamental differences between men and women because these differences have been designed by God for us to complement one another. So we don't minimize them; we celebrate them!

That's why Paul goes on in the last few verses of this paragraph to talk about some men who apparently in that day were growing their hair out long like women, to their disgrace, and Paul says in that culture, "Don't go against God's design." Celebrate who God has made you to be as a man or as a woman, and celebrate your complementary uniqueness in that. Paul says, "The way to do this at Corinth is for women to cover their heads when they're praying or prophesying."

We know culturally that this dealt with specific customs pertinent to Corinth in the first century, so this passage is not given to us to say to all women of all time, "Cover your

heads when you pray.” This is where—and we talked about this a good bit when we dove into a similar passage in 1 Timothy 2, so I won’t recount that whole discussion here—but this is where we distinguish between cultural expression and central revelation.

The whole point is what Paul says in the very start. “The head of every man is Christ, the head of a wife is her husband, and the head of Christ is God.” We know that’s not just cultural because that goes back all the way to the beginning of creation. That’s theological. That’s central. The Bible is saying that when Christians gather together, there should be evidence of glad submission to loving authority, particularly in the relationships between husbands and wives, men and women, but at the same time a godly understanding of gender mutuality—that men and women, husbands and wives are equally valuable to Christ and uniquely helpful to one another. I want to challenge you, even in your small groups, to consider ways that your gathering together can best reflect these two characteristics in our culture and our context.

Clear commitment to physical modesty.

Which leads right into a third characteristic of Christian gathering: A clear commitment to physical modesty. I’ll hit this one quickly because, again, we don’t know all the details of what life was like in Corinth. But it’s almost certain that a woman’s lack of covering on her head was a picture of looseness in that culture. A head covering for a woman was a symbol of modesty. Again, see the cultural expression but don’t miss the central revelation: The Bible is saying here to women, “Pray and prophesy in ways that display a clear commitment to physical modesty.”

Undoubtedly, there are ways that central revelation can (and must) be applied to the church in our culture. Here it may not be head covering, but if a woman, in any gathering of the church, is wearing immodest clothing in any sense, this would not be honoring either to her husband or to other men in the church or to God. Women and men, may there be a clear commitment to physical modesty in this room and in every small group, in every type of gathering of this church. Why?

Profound sense of spiritual humility.

Fourth characteristic of a Christian gathering, a profound sense of spiritual humility. The reason why women (or men) must be modest in their dress is because they don’t want to draw attention to themselves, but to God. When Christians gather together, their whole goal is drawing attention to the glory of God. Clearly, whatever was happening at Corinth was drawing attention away from God and toward certain women, which was not good. In a Christian gathering, we want it to be clear that the focus of our attention and the object of our affection is God alone.

This is what we’ll get to in 1 Corinthians 14, when Paul will say, “We want people to walk away from your gathering, saying, ‘*God is really among you!*’” (1 Corinthians 14:25). That’s the point. In any worship gathering, any small group gathering, we want people to walk away having seen God among us, and no one/nothing else.

One more way we see this profound sense of spiritual humility is in the very last verse of this section. In verse 16, Paul writes, “*If anyone is inclined to be contentious, we have no such practice, nor do the churches of God*” (1 Corinthians 11:16). What Paul is saying there is basically, “Corinth, no one else in any of the other churches is doing what you’re doing, having women pray and prophesy with their heads uncovered. And if that’s the case,” Paul says, “then you really need to rethink whether this is glorifying to God, when you’re the only church that’s doing this.”

This is good for us. Yes, the Word alone is our authority, yet if we ever find ourselves doing something as a church that no other church in history has ever done, then that's probably a clue to us that we need to rethink what we're doing. That's not to say that we just need to do what every other church in our culture is doing, but it is to say that we need to acknowledge the Spirit of God at work in many other churches around us in the world and throughout history, because we can learn a lot from them.

I put in your notes here a deferential accountability to the churches of God. In other words, our gatherings should reflect a respect for the work of Christ in other churches and accountability to like-minded churches who, when they point out something we're doing something that goes against God's Word, then we stop and listen to what they're saying.

Selfless devotion to covenantal unity.

All of that leads to the last half of the chapter, where we see one more characteristic of a Christian gathering, and that's selfless devotion to covenantal unity. The last part of 1 Corinthians 11 is all about the Lord's Supper, but Paul doesn't include this bit here about communion just to teach them to practice it. Instead, he's correcting them for the wrongful way in which they're practicing it. In fact, he goes so far as to say in verse 20 that they think they're celebrating the Lord's Supper, but it's not the Lord's Supper they're eating. The Lord's Supper, Paul says, is a covenant meal that is celebrated by a community of Christians who come together around the body and blood of Christ, and in that way, it's a picture of unity in the church. But this is not the Supper the Corinthians were celebrating.

On the contrary, the Corinthian version of the Lord's Supper neglected the needy in the church. To make sure you have the picture: The church in Corinth would gather together, likely on a Sunday night, and everyone would bring food. But they wouldn't bring it like a potluck to share with others; they would each bring their own food for themselves. The rich in the church would bring a lot of good food (and drink) for themselves, and the poor in the church would hardly bring any food (or drink) for themselves. When they got there, the rich wouldn't share with the poor. Even worse, oftentimes because the poor worked in more slave-like jobs, they wouldn't be able to control their schedule, so they'd come to the meal late, and by the time they got there, not only was all the good food gone, but all the rich people were practically drunk.

That was the setting in which they were celebrating the Lord's Supper, and Paul says, "You've missed the whole point! This is not the Lord's Supper!" He tells them what the Lord's Supper is. He describes how the Lord's Supper symbolizes Christ's selfless devotion to us—to make us a covenant community that then reflects that selfless devotion to one another.

Paul says, because this wasn't the case at Corinth, they deserved the discipline of Christ. Verses 27-31 are stern, to say the least, as Paul says, "You guys know that some of you have been sick, and some have even died. It's because of how you've treated the Lord's Supper." Again, we don't know all the details behind this, but it's clear that God, in disciplining His church, was allowing sickness, and even death, to come on some church members because of the careless, selfish way in which they had approached the Lord's Supper.

This is serious stuff, what we're about to do in communion. In light of that, I want to take a moment before we share this meal in this gathering to remind us what this meal is about—the Christian version of the Lord's Supper. This is not just religious routine that we go

through at the end of our gatherings. No, this is a hugely important meal that has consequences, not just for your spiritual life, but for your physical life and death.

So let's ask the key questions about the Lord's Supper. One, who should participate in this Supper? The clear teaching of Scripture is that Christians (followers of Christ walking in repentance and faith) share in the work of Christ as they partake of the Lord's Supper. I use the word "share" there because, back in 1 Corinthians 10, Paul talked about how, in the Lord's Supper, we "share" in the body and the blood of Christ as Christians whose lives are united with His work on our behalf. Every place in the New Testament where we see the Lord's Supper, it specifically involves followers of Christ. I put there "walking in repentance and faith" because if someone claims to be a Christian but is deliberately walking in disobedience to God in any area of their life, then they're not participating in this Supper in a worthy manner, the Bible says in verse 27.

It's not that we need to make ourselves worthy. None of us can do that; we are all sinners in need of a Savior. But that's just it. In coming to this table, we are acknowledging that we have turned (and are continually turning) from our sin, and we have trusted (and are continually trusting) in Jesus as our Lord.

So for every person in this gathering today who is not a follower of Christ walking in repentance and faith, we ask you not to eat this meal with us in a moment. And parents, we ask you not to let your children participate in this meal until they've come to the point where they've made that step of repentance and faith. On this point, I want to be as clear as possible. It does not matter how many times you have been to church, it does not matter how many times you have taken communion in church, it does not matter who you are with or what you want to communicate to the people around you. God's Word is saying in this gathering this morning, "Do not take this bread and this cup if your life is not identified as a follower of Christ walking in repentance and faith."

Now as soon as I say that, I know that sounds totally inhospitable, saying to guests among us, "You're not allowed to participate with us," but that's not at all what I'm saying. I'm saying the Bible prohibits anyone who is not a follower of Christ walking in repentance and faith from eating this meal, but that doesn't mean you're entirely passive in it. Christians share in the work of Christ as they eat the Lord's Supper, and non-Christians see the work of Christ as they watch the Lord's Supper. For those of you in this gathering who are not followers of Christ, more than anything as we celebrate this meal, we want you to see a picture of Christ's love for you. We want you to see a picture of how God has made a way for you to be forgiven of all your sin against Him, how God has sent His Son to die on a cross so that you can be saved from your sin and reconciled to God now and for all of eternity. Even as we participate in this meal, we want to urge you in your heart to repent (to turn from your sin and yourself) and to believe (to put your faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord). But if you are not ready to do that, if you still have questions about that, then we invite you, when we come to these tables in a moment, to simply observe a gathering of people who have found eternal life in Christ's sacrificial death.

Which is what the Lord's Supper is all about. I'll hit this "what" question briefly because we've spent more time on this in the past, and you can go on the *Radical* website and find more resources there about this (just search under Lord's Supper). A traditional misunderstanding sees the Lord's Supper as a change of substance that results in salvation. The two-dollar theological term here is transubstantiation, and this is the traditional Roman Catholic understanding of the Lord's Supper.

According to the Roman Catholic Church, in the Eucharist (the Mass) the bread and wine actually become the body and blood of Christ. With the body and the blood of Christ being actually present in the elements, the stakes are raised to the point where to receive communion is to receive Christ. So communion then has huge ramifications for salvation. To quote directly from Catholic teaching, "Communion with the Body and Blood of Christ [thus] increases (one's) union with the Lord, forgives his venial sins, and preserves him from grave sins." Forgives his sins. Take the meal, receive Christ, and obtain forgiveness.

I point this out to help us realize that the way we view the Lord's Supper is key to a biblical understanding of the gospel. Transubstantiation is a traditional misunderstanding, a grave misunderstanding really, for a biblical understanding of the Lord's Supper sees it as a symbolic meal that reflects salvation. There is nothing in Scripture to point us to the bread actually becoming Christ's body and the drink actually becoming Christ's blood in a way that we receive Christ and forgiveness through eating and drinking this meal. So we don't celebrate this meal to receive salvation; instead, we celebrate this meal to reflect the salvation we've already received by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

When do we participate in the Lord's Supper? The only biblical expectation we have in the New Testament is to observe it often, a word Paul uses here in verses 25 and 26. We don't have a specific command to do this every week or every month or every quarter. There may be a pattern of its weekly observance, so we participate in it every week here.

Which leads to the where of the Lord's Supper. The only biblical requirement for the Lord's Supper is a gathering of the church. Four different times in this chapter, Paul talks about the church coming together. So, this is not a meal that's intended to be celebrated alone but with the body of Christ when we gather together.

Why is this such an important part of our gathering? Scripture seems to give a fourfold answer to that question. One, we celebrate the Lord's Supper to remember the body and blood of Jesus. In verses 24 and 25 here, Paul quotes from Jesus, who told us to do this in remembrance of Him. The Lord's Supper is not about imagining, channeling, dreaming or meditating. This Supper is about remembering a real time in real history. When you take the bread, remember the body of Jesus. Remember that God became flesh for you, that He suffered as a man for you, that He physically died on a cross for you. Remember His body given for you. When you take the cup, remember the blood of Jesus. Remember the precious price that was paid to cleanse you from all your guilt and to seal your covenant relationship with God.

Remember, and then reflect. The purpose of the Lord's Supper is to reflect upon our sin and His salvation. We reflect upon our sin and the severity of it. In the words of 1 Corinthians 11:28, we examine ourselves and consider any and all sin that is in our hearts, our minds, our lives. We must do this, for if we don't, the Bible says, we eat and drink judgment upon ourselves. This is serious stuff.

God says, "Don't take the Lord's Supper lightly." Mom or dad, don't think, "Well, I know my child hasn't come to faith in Christ, but I'm just going to let him take the bread or a drink." Don't do it. They need to see the seriousness of this in you. Teenager, man, woman, I urge you not to sit here and think, "Okay, when is this deal going to be over so I can get to a real meal for lunch?" Don't think like that. Fix your thoughts on the cross, and see the severity of your sin in it.

And as you reflect upon your sin, reflect upon His salvation. As you confess specific sins, hear Christ saying over every single one of them, "I've covered it; I've covered it; I've covered it." This is where this meal just comes alive because we're feasting on—not in a physical way, but in a spiritual way with a physical symbol—God's forgiveness of us through Christ. We're feasting on God's faithfulness to us in Christ. We're looking at our sin with remorse and repentance, and He's feeding our souls with His mercy and His grace.

Which then compels us in the Lord's Supper to renew our commitment to Christ, the church, and the Great Commission. Our affections are awakened to Christ as we are reminded of our identity in Him, our unity with Him. Then (and this is what the Corinthians were missing!), we look around at one another and realize, "I've not just been united with Christ. I've been united to His church." So we renew our commitment to love each other as we have been loved, to serve each other as we have been served. It makes no sense for us to celebrate the Lord's Supper while ignoring the brother or sister in need next to us, so we go to them and we serve them. We renew our commitment to the church.

And we renew our commitment to the Great Commission. Verse 26, "*As often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes*" (1 Corinthians 11:26). There's proclamation in the Lord's Supper. We're not just eating and drinking here; we are proclaiming. This is what our mission is all about, right? Proclamation of the gospel. We participate in its proclamation when we partake of the Lord's Supper. When we eat this bread and drink from this cup, we proclaim that Jesus has died so that repentance and forgiveness of sins might be preached in all nations.

We're going to proclaim the Lord's death like this, verse 26, until He comes. The last reason why we celebrate the Lord's Supper is to rejoice that Christ has set us free and is coming back. The Lord's Supper does not leave us solemnly remembering, but eagerly rejoicing, for we have been set free from our sins, and we know that Christ is coming back for us. Jesus told His disciples at the institution of this Supper, "*I tell you I will not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom*" (Matthew 26:29). We drink this cup, crying out in our hearts, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly!"

So then, how should we now celebrate the Lord's Supper this morning? This text beckons us in this gathering of Christians first to look within. Examine yourself (verse 28). What sin is there in your heart, your mind, your life that needs to be repented of, confessed, broken over, turned from? Then, look to others. Are there barriers between you and any other member of this body? Even now, before you take these elements, go to that person and be reconciled to them. Are there brothers and sisters in need whom you have neglected? How can you selflessly love them as you celebrate the sacrificial love of Christ? Look within, look to others, and ultimately look to Christ. Look to Christ as your Savior and look to Christ as your Lord. Look to Christ as your life as you celebrate His death.

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