

1 Cor 11:17-34 - "Healthy Church - Healthy Eating"
~ Small group facilitators notes

Opener (IF YOU NEED ONE): What are your thoughts on potlucks? Love them? Hate them? Indifference? And why do you feel this way?

Before you read the passage for this week, it's important to note that celebrating the Lord's Supper looked a lot different 2000 years ago. We often read, "breaking bread together" in the early church which in Acts 2 was a daily occurrence and by Acts 20, Paul did it on, "the first day of the week [Sunday]." It was a complete meal and either incorporated or ended with the Lord's Supper as instigated by Jesus ("do this in remembrance of me").

Read 1 Cor 11:17-34.

Q. Why does Paul not commend them (think bigger than just what's in v.17)? Are the divisions / factions in the church a good thing?

A. It would appear that there's some kind of split between the rich and the poor. The rich are overindulging when the church comes together and the poor are going hungry. Paul says, "this is not the Lord's supper, this is your own supper!" Perhaps people were bringing food and keeping it to themselves? In this situation, Paul suggests that the factions are a good thing because at least it suggests that not everyone has forgotten the reason for the Lord's Supper (although ultimately Paul would never suggest that divisions are good in a church).

Q. Why does the church celebrate the Lord's Supper?

A. Firstly probably because the church is commanded to (it's an ordinance (command) along with baptism). But also we do it, "to proclaim the Lord's death until he comes" (v.26).

Q. What does it mean to proclaim the Lord's death until he comes?

A. I'm sure the obvious answer is something about remembrance. But when Jesus and the disciples gathered to celebrate Passover before the Passion, Jesus says, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God" (Luke 22:15-16). So both Passover and Lord's Supper are probably meant to be precursors of the Messianic Banquet ("marriage supper of the lamb" - Rev 19).

Q. What is happening to the Corinthian church as a result of inappropriate behaviour as they come together?

A. Some are weak and some have died (v30)!!!

What is that all about? Is God killing people off for not taking Communion correctly? Perhaps (I hope) there's something else going on here? Certainly in the bigger picture, Jesus (through Paul here) is saying that the wine is a symbol of Jesus' blood which is the New Covenant.

Q. With Scriptural support (doesn't need to be chapter and verse) why is there a New Covenant? What was wrong with the Old (law and circumcision)?

A. The law was temporary (Gal 3:21-22) and animal sacrifice could never atone for the sins of mankind (Hebrews 8:6 and following). Jesus died for all - past, present and future - he is the only way to the Father (John 14:6).

I suggest Paul's talking about those who are slipping out of covenant. His command is to examine yourself (v28) and judge yourself before God judges you (vv30-31).

Q. When does God judge us? Now? Every time we sin? Some point in the future? Before time began?

A. Although this passage suggests that God is constantly judging people, I suggest that God, being outside of time, already knows our entire lives and knows whether or not we will choose him yet does not force himself on us (free will). Inevitably everyone will be judged according to their faith, not their works, but James (2:14ff) would suggest that works are evidence of faith. Therefore sinful behaviour is evidence of no faith which is spiritual death (and maybe even physical death - v30).

Q. So why does Paul say to “examine yourself” and “judge yourself before you’re judged by the Lord?”

A. So that spiritual death never happens. It’s important to do a spiritual checkup every now and again. Psalm 139:23-24 says:

*Search me, O God, and know my heart!
Try me and know my thoughts!
And see if there be any grievous way in me,
and lead me in the way everlasting!*

To close, why not spend some time in prayer for one another, especially if anyone is struggling spiritually. If not, pray for the church that we would faithfully uphold one another as disciples.