DISCERNING THE BODY

In 1 Corinthians 11, Paul addresses some problems that the Corinthian church was experiencing with the Lord's Supper. Starting in v. 17, Paul tells the Christians at Corinth that their practice of the Lord's Supper was so messed up that it would have been better if they had not observed it at all!

First, he criticizes the Corinthians because of the **divisions** that characterize their assembly and then he criticizes their **self-centered eating practices** when they partake of the Lord's Supper. Some were going hungry while others were getting drunk.

This might seem strange in our context, where we eat a pinch of cracker and drink a small swallow of grape juice, but against the background of their culture, the Corinthians were most likely partaking of the Lord's Supper in the context of a meal, which makes sense when you think about it, because Jesus Himself instituted the Lord's Supper in the context of a meal.

We can't be exactly sure of what the Corinthian meal looked like, but we do know that it wasn't a meal characterized by fellowship and sharing—it was about selfishness. The poor were left physically hungry and socially humiliated, and the church was divided.

Paul seeks to correct their practice. He recounts the words of Jesus at the Last Supper:

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.

(1 Corinthians 11.23-26, ESV)

Paul's point is that Jesus shared the bread and the cup with his disciples to represent his death on the cross, and it is that sacrificial love that Christians are supposed to show as well. In other words, it is impossible for the Corinthians to proclaim the death of Christ and the love it represents at the same time that they are eating a meal where they humiliate one other!

Paul goes on to teach that improper observance of the Lord's Supper leads to judgment from God:

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.

(1 Corinthians 11.27-29, ESV)

When Paul talks about "discerning the body", given the context of the passage, he must be referring to *both* Christ himself *and* the church, which is his corporate body. He has just talked about both of these things in this passage.

In other words, the Lord's Supper has both **vertical** and **horizontal** dimensions. It is a reminder of our fellowship with God and with one another. The Corinthians need to reflect on the body of Jesus which was offered on the cross on their behalf (vertical), but what that sacrificial death means should lead them to treat one another—the body of Christ—in loving ways (horizontal).

When either of these dimensions is ignored, the Lord's Supper is taken in an unworthy manner, and judgment is the result.

So as we partake of the Lord's Supper this morning, let us try to "discern the body." Let us reflect back to the body of Jesus which was hung on the cross for us, and let us be thankful for that sacrifice.

But let us also reflect on the body of Christ which meets here and around the world. How can we love one other more perfectly? How can we seek to build up unity more intentionally? How can we fellowship with one another more fully? How can we hold each other accountable more faithfully?

Let's pray together for the bread and fruit of the vine.

*This Lord's Supper meditation was downloaded from **lukedockery.com/free-resources**. Check there for other resources including Bible class series, stand-alone lessons, and eBooks.*