

THE LOOKOUT

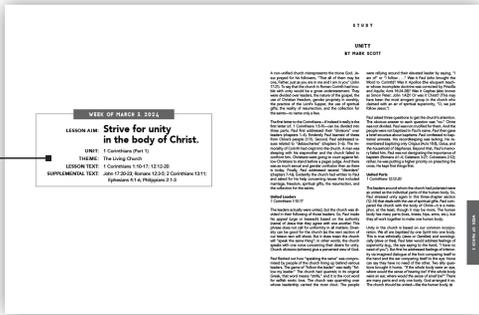
MARCH 2024

Unit: 1 Corinthians (Part 1) Theme: The Living Church

Overview: The church at Corinth had problems, as most churches do... even those that are vibrant and growing. Life was not easy in the pagan Roman culture. Life in the church was not much different. The Corinthian church had problems with unity, leaders, morality, marriage, freedoms, idolatry, spiritual gifts, love, the resurrection, and the collection for the saints. But the church of today can learn to be united from a divided church like Corinth. In this study, we highlight what constitutes unity, the nature of servant leadership, the constraints of freedom, the unifying significance of Communion, and the functioning of the body of Christ.

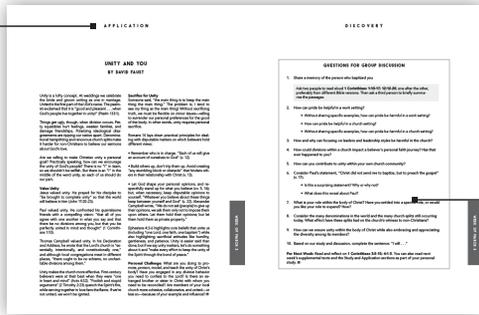
HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF MARCH 24, 2024

LESSON AIM: **Share the Lord's Supper
with greater appreciation
for the body of Christ.**

UNIT: 1 Corinthians (Part 1)

THEME: The Living Church

LESSON TEXT: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Matthew 26:17-30; Luke 22:14-23;
1 Corinthians 10:14-22

STUDY

COMMUNION

BY MARK SCOTT

A secular proverb says, “When all else fails, read the directions.” Sometimes directions can be skipped with no negative consequence, but more typically when we go it alone, we wish we had done a better job of reading the directions. The Corinthian church had trouble following directions . . . although the Greek word translated as “directives” in 1 Corinthians 11:17 is different from the one translated as “directions” in v. 34. The first word means “to pass on an announcement,” and the second word means “to command.”

First Corinthians 11 is really an appendage to Paul’s argument about eating meat offered to the idol gods in chapters 8 to 10. Paul provided the church with principles to guide them in using their freedoms in Christ. It is not a far jump from discussing eating in idol temples to eating in the church assembly. The church was following well some of the traditions/directions (e.g., the propriety of men’s and women’s roles in the assemblies, 11:2-16). Certain cultural constraints were followed in terms of gender to ensure things were orderly. But the partaking of Communion was a disaster. Paul was not pleased at all. He told them their *meetings do more harm than good*.

Bad Practice

1 Corinthians 11:17-22

The way the church was observing the Lord’s Supper served to spotlight the divisions (schisms) in the church. These *differences* (factions or heresies) were quite severe.

The context for Paul’s remarks concerned what is typically referred to as an “agape feast.” When the church gathered they read the “memoirs of the apostles” (wrote Justin Martyr), prayed, and shared food in something like a basket dinner fellowship. It was in this context that the church observed the Lord’s Supper.

But selfishness, pride, and even money seemed to drive some of the Communion dysphoria. Their lack of unity and genuine care for one another was evidenced in bad practices. People went ahead without waiting for others (some who were slaves probably had to work on the first day of the week). The poorer ones would become *hungry* while waiting and the rich perhaps would begin to get *drunk*. Paul rebuked the church by saying that these bad practices mocked the poor people in the church and caused the church to be despised. Paul said that if they needed a snack they should have eaten it at home before gathering together.

Good Tradition

1 Corinthians 11:23-26

This might be the most frequently read passage in Christendom. This paragraph is read more often than even John 3:16. Paul incorporated the tradition about Communion that came straight from the Gospel record (Matthew 26:26-29; Mark 14:22-25; Luke 22:14-23). Like Paul did earlier in the Epistle when he addressed their divisions (1 Corinthians 1:10-17) by taking the Corinthians back to the message of the cross (1:18–2:5), so here he seeks to correct their bad practices by taking them back to the night Jesus was in the upper room.

When Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper on the eve of his crucifixion, he took bread, gave thanks, broke the bread, and then identified the bread as his body. Likewise, with the cup, he identified its contents as the new covenant in his blood. In both cases the disciples were to remember Jesus and his sacrifice. While these substances might not change into Jesus’ actual body and blood (as Catholics contend), they probably are more than just emblems. Something rather mystical occurs. This marvelous paragraph of tradition acted as a sanity check for the Corinthians’ selfish practice at the Lord’s table.

Unworthy Manner

1 Corinthians 11:27-34

More than one user of the *King James Version* understood the word *unworthily* about how one feels in coming to the Lord’s table. But Paul was not talking about what believers feel when they come before the Lord at his table. He was teaching that believers who fail to see the unifying power of the Supper in the church are taking Communion in an unworthy manner (i.e., having no regard for their brothers and sisters in the faith).

Therefore, some introspection is demanded. Believers should *examine themselves* (test in such a way as to be approved). These Christians need to *discern the body of Christ*. *Discern* means “to critique.” As church members eat the bread and drink the cup, they should assess their relationships in the church. The untoward way some believers were acting toward other believers had caused such stress that some had become *sick* and others had died.

Coming to Communion is serious business. God may just use that Supper to judge and discipline people. We should not want to hurt the Body of Christ over the body of Christ. ■

APPLICATION

COMMUNION: MORE THAN A ROUTINE

BY DAVID FAUST

Like *route*, our term *routine* comes from the French word for “a beaten path.” A routine is a well-worn path, the usual route we take—our customary way of doing things, like drinking a morning cup of coffee. It’s good if our daily routine includes prayer and Bible reading, but Jesus warned not to pray with “vain repetitions” (Matthew 6:7, *King James Version*). How can we do something frequently without taking it for granted? How can we keep the beaten path from becoming a rut?

Throughout history, Christ’s followers have placed high value on the Lord’s Supper. Whatever else takes place in our weekly worship gatherings—no matter what the sermon is about or what songs we sing—the bread and the cup focus attention on the central facts of our faith: the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. The church’s Head said, “Do this in remembrance of me,” so Communion should never be relegated to a place of unimportance in our assemblies, nor should it be done mechanically and carelessly.

In this sacred feast, we look backward and remember Jesus, look upward and give thanks, look inward and examine ourselves, look outward and acknowledge God’s family of believers, and look forward to the Lord’s return.

How can we keep from turning the Lord’s Supper into an empty routine? I asked a few Christian friends that question, and their responses (below) were insightful.

Thank God

- “Communion is the high point of the service—a ‘garden moment’ to spend with the Lord. The person I love most asked that I remember him this way.”
- “Every time I sit down for a regular meal, I say a short prayer of thanks before I eat. When I take Communion, I thank God for providing salvation.”
- “During Communion I think about the Trinity and praise the Father who is *for* us, the Son who is *with* us, and the Holy Spirit who is *in* us.”

Examine Ourselves

- “Communion provides quiet space to connect with the Lord. I need that!”
- “I reflect on the past week and think about how God’s grace helped me make it to another Sunday.”
- “It’s a time for introspection. I think about things in my life the Lord might want to change.”

Ponder the Big Picture

- “God’s people have been doing this for 2,000 years. I picture myself celebrating Communion in unity with Christians all over the world who serve the same Lord.”
- “Even though we’re all from different backgrounds and walks of life, the Holy Spirit brings us together as we remember Christ’s sacrifice on the cross.”

Prepare to Participate

- “I think about Bible verses I have read during the week. Without food, we become weak and cranky, and we do not function well. But food tastes better when there is variety and seasoning is applied. A regular diet of God’s Word provides the variety and seasoning to keep our Communion time fresh.”
- “It helps when the worship leader reads a short Scripture and offers a few well-planned remarks (focused on one simple thought) to prepare us for the Supper.”

Communion is a well-worn path—a route leading back to the cross. Another friend summed up his approach to the Lord’s Supper by saying, “I focus on what Jesus did, as opposed to what I’m doing. There’s nothing routine about what Jesus did for me.”

Personal Challenge: Do you participate in Communion regularly, sincerely, and wholeheartedly? What steps could you take to better prepare yourself? **L**

DISCOVERY

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

1. What is your favorite passage of Scripture or story from the Bible?

Ask two people to read aloud **1 Corinthians 11:17-34**, one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

2. Some Christians contend that partaking of the Lord's Supper (also referred to as Communion) is the most important part of a worship service. What are some reasons to support this opinion?
3. The Lord's Supper, as practiced by the Corinthians, served to spotlight divisions within the church. In fact, Paul said, "Your meetings do more harm than good" (v. 17). What were some of the bad practices and divisions evident in the church at Corinth?
4. Why were Paul's teachings about the Lord's Supper such an important correction to the Corinthian church? Why do Paul's teachings on the Lord's Supper remain important to the 21st-century Christian church?
5. In the Scripture text for last week's lesson, Paul wrote, "No one should seek their own good, but the good of others" (10:24). In what ways was that *not* occurring with respect to celebrating the Lord's Supper in the Corinthian church?
6. Paul wrote, "Whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord" (v. 27).
 - What are some examples today of how we might participate in Communion "in an unworthy manner"?
7. Describe your personal practice for centering your thoughts in preparation for participating in the Lord's Supper in a *worthy* manner.
8. The Lord's Supper observance among Christians is unique in so many ways. Discuss some of the unique aspects of this memorial to our Lord, especially when compared to other memorials.
9. Lesson writer Mark Scott holds the opinion that 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 "might be the most frequently read passage in Christendom." Why is that the case? What are some other possibilities as "most frequently read passage"?
10. Based on our study and discussion, complete the sentence: "I will . . ."

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **1 Corinthians 12:12-26; 14:1-12**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts and the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. ■