

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

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[0 : 00] Thank you, Ruth, for reading, and it would be a great help to me if you could keep your Bibles open at 1 Corinthians 11, page 115. And as always, or as usual, you can find an outline inside the notice sheet to see the points that we're going to be thinking about together.

So our regular teaching diet at St. Silas, as you'll know, is to work through books of the Bible, chapter by chapter, letting God set the agenda week by week as to what he says to us. We've just had a series in Hebrews. Last week, we started a series in 2 Samuel. But today, we're doing something different as a one-off, and it might feel, if you're a visitor or on the edges of St. Silas, today's going to feel a bit more like family time as we as a church family think together about how we do communion.

So the Lord's Supper, sometimes it's called Holy Communion, sometimes it's called the Eucharist, which just means Thanksgiving. We were discussing communion as a vestry, as a leadership body, and then various questions were asked about it as well.

And we decided that we're not going to kind of change in an immediate hurry how we do communion. But because there are different views and there's a bit of confusion about what's going on when we have communion, it just seems sensible to have a time of reflecting on God's Word so that families especially can reflect together in light of God's Word about how we do communion and what would be right for them and for their children.

[1 : 27] So let's pray and let's ask for God's help. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the gift of the Lord's Supper, a visible Word for us, instituted by the Lord Jesus Christ and commanded by him for us to continue until we see him again.

Lord Jesus, as we gather together as your people around your Word, we ask that you will work in us to transform us, that this time of listening and our meditations and thoughts will be used by you in our hearts so that as a community we grow in our appreciation of communion and you work in us what's pleasing to you.

For your name's sake, amen. So it's possible to believe in your mind the central truths of the Christian faith and yet it not really to transform how you live for those truths that Jesus died for sins and rose again, not really to govern the direction of your life and so that in practice we're still more shaped by the culture around us than by God's Word.

And God gives us a number of key means of grace. We call them means of grace, spiritual gifts that he uses to kind of get the penny to drop in our lives, get the truths of the Gospel down into our hearts.

So one of them would be personal Bible reading and prayer. Another would be gathering among each other and encouraging each other, spurring each other on, hearing God's Word proclaimed in sermons.

[3 : 05] But a special gift that God has given us in this area is the Lord's Supper. There's nothing magical or automatic about how it works, but God works in us as we receive it by faith and with understanding.

So this is a chance for us to be thinking, what should we be reflecting on as we share the Lord's Supper? I've got six points and as we all know, the best sermons have three points.

So basically this is two sermons in one. But we'll see how we go. Six directions in which we look and they're on the sheet. So first, when we share the Lord's Supper, we look back to the night of our amazing deliverance.

In 1 Corinthians 11, 26, For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death. Communion points us back to the night that Jesus was betrayed and he shared the last supper with his disciples.

Jesus gathered with his disciples in an upper room for the Passover meal. And the Passover meal was commanded for every Jewish household every year to remember their amazing deliverance. [4 : 21] And it's very special. The youngest person at the meal asks set questions. They say, why is this night different from all other nights? And the story is retold of how their ancestors were slaves in Egypt.

And after much warning to Pharaoh to let the people go and him refusing, God brought a judgment on Egypt, on the firstborn son of every household. And Israelite households could take a lamb into their home and they kill the lamb.

And they put the blood on the doorposts. And when the angel of the Lord brought the judgment, he passed over those households. It's the Passover. So Jesus is in the upper room.

It's the Passover meal. But he starts giving new meanings to the elements of the meal. Because that rescue was just a shadow of the rescue he's about to enact the next day when he dies on the cross.

So when they take the bread, the unleavened bread at the meal, instead of it being this is the bread of our affliction from when we were in the desert, Jesus is saying, no, this is the bread of my affliction.

[5 : 28] I'm going to die in your place on the cross. It's my body given for you. And that's because Jesus is the Passover lamb. The prophets knew it was coming.

Isaiah says in Isaiah 53, 700 years before, he says this, We all like sheep have gone astray. Each of us has turned to his own way. And the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth. He was led like a lamb to the slaughter. And as a sheep before its shearers is silent. So he did not open his mouth.

He is the lamb of God. So Jesus is saying, this is my body and blood of a new covenant, which is shed for you and for many for the forgiveness of sins. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me.

Jesus has then given us two signs for his covenant people, people who are trusting him, baptism and communion.

[6 : 28] And the Lord's Supper, in a sense, whenever we share it, it's an act of covenant renewal. We're reminded again of those covenant promises God has made with us and how by faith we are joined into those promises.

So at St. Silas, we're really glad that every week here we've got people who are not Christians in amongst us. And that's terrific. If you're here and you're not yet a Christian, you're very welcome among us as you're thinking more about the Christian faith, as you're building friendships here. But when it comes to communion, if you're not yet a believer, it's better if you don't have the bread and wine. And church denominations, we're part of a denomination, the Anglican Communion Worldwide, which is the Scottish Episcopal Church.

And the Scottish Episcopal Church, like many denominations, has tended to say that because baptism kind of marks the start of your journey in the Christian life, you should get baptized before you have communion.

Now at St. Silas, we don't enforce that, and I've got no appetite to enforce that, partly because we want to be open to the very real possibility that you might come here one Sunday, not a Christian, not yet baptized, and you might become a Christian today.

[7 : 47] And if that's you, you don't need to wait till you get baptized to have the bread and wine with us, join us in having communion. So we welcome all Christians to the Lord's table.

Having said that, if you've not been baptized, but you think that you're ready to have communion, please do reflect on that, because if you're having communion, there is no good reason, really, that I can think of why you wouldn't get baptized.

Jesus commands us to be baptized, so why not get baptized if you think you're ready for communion? So that's our first point. We look back at our amazing deliverance.

The second thing we do is we look forward to an assured future at an amazing feast. Paul goes on in verse 26, For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Jesus, in his parables, he pictures heaven like a banquet, because banquets are really good. And when we receive bread and wine, we're anticipating that heavenly banquet.

[8 : 54] All we have to do is accept the invitation. King Jesus is holding this banquet in heaven, and if you trust him and accept his invitation, your name is on his list, and you can be at the banquet.

So when we have the Lord's Supper, we're modeling the way that great banquet works. That Christ provides and we receive by faith. If you think about it, if you were invited by the queen to a banquet at the queen's palace, and you tried to pay for the meal, you would offend the queen.

She doesn't need you to pay. She's the queen. And it's a bit like that with Jesus, that we don't try and offend him by thinking, well, what can I bring to get into heaven? What good works can I offer? No, we accept that he is paid by dying on the cross, that we can come in to the banquet. And that helps us understand what we're modeling when we have communion.

Sometimes people are reluctant to take communion because they feel unworthy. I've come across that more in Scotland since I moved here than in England, interestingly, that people ask, do I feel worthy enough today to take communion?

[10 : 07] Am I good enough to have communion? And the answer to that is, of course you're not good enough to have communion. But if you wait until you're good enough, you'll never have it.

Of course we're unworthy. But that's because it's a picture of the gospel. If you wait until you're worthy, you'll never have communion. But Christ is the host, and we're his guests, and he's delighted to offer us a place at his banquet.

So you might head up for communion with your head down in shame, looking at your feet in shame at your sin. But Jesus says, look up, take your eyes away from your shame.

Look at my death died for you on the cross, in love for you, and accept my invitation in full assurance that you'll be at my banquet by faith. Come and eat with me.

We look forward. Thirdly, we look up. We look up and feed on Christ in our hearts. This is where Christians have fallen out over the centuries.

[11 : 12] The big issue here is, in what sense is Christ with us as we have bread and wine? Our friends in the Roman Catholic Church, most of my family in the Roman Catholic Church, believe that when you have communion, the bread and wine have actually changed into Jesus' body and blood.

This is my body. Coming out of the Reformation, when 500 years ago, Christians rediscovered the truths in the Bible, there were different strands of thought about what was going on at communion. Luther and the Lutherans came to a similar view to Roman Catholics. It's a bit different, but it's similar. It's called consubstantiation, that Christ is somehow physically present, as we have bread and wine.

On the other side of the Reformation, there was a man, Ulrich Zwingli, and the Zwinglians, and they said, Christ is not in any way any more present when we have communion than he's present with us as his people all the time.

All we're doing is an act of remembrance. And the Anabaptists who followed Zwingli, that's what they said. We're just remembering. But in Geneva, John Calvin, reflecting on the Scriptures carefully, developed what's sometimes called the Reformed view.

[12 : 25] This was Reformed Christianity, came out from John Calvin. And it's that Reformed view that came into St. Silas, and Anglicanism, as it is, and came into Scottish Presbyterianism, and lots of Protestant churches around the world.

And it's the view that Christ isn't physically present when we have communion, but he is spiritually present in a special way. He's not physically present because, of course, he's risen from the dead with a resurrection body.

He's got a physical body now, and it's in heaven. So he can't be here physically. But when we have communion in faith, Jesus is present with us in a special way.

Now, we get that partly from the chapter before 1 Corinthians 11, chapter 10, where it says in verse 16, In other words, there's a very close fellowship with Jesus when we have bread and wine.

He's with us in a heightened way, and we can feed on him spiritually. It's a bit like with preaching. When God's word is faithfully preached, God is specially present.

[13 : 44] We hear his voice. And Christ gives us spiritual sustenance to our ears to engage our heads and our understanding and to engage our hearts and change our will.

And communion is like a different form of preaching. It's a visible word. It engages our eyes as we look. It engages our sense of smell as we smell the elements, our sense of taste and touch.

That's why it's so powerful. And as God engages us in that way, we're invited to appropriate his promises. Appropriation is like taking ownership of them. And this is where, as a covenant sign, it's a bit different from baptism, actually. Because baptism is fundamentally something that's done to you. You're baptized by the church. And it's a picture of how God saves you. You don't save yourself. God saves you and washes you clean. But communion needs us to participate more, more actively than in baptism, because we're invited, draw near with faith, receive, take the bread and eat, take the wine and drink, feed on him in your heart by faith with thanksgiving.

[14 : 55] It's about appropriation of what Christ has done for you. In other words, it's like saying, yes, I believe, as you have bread and wine. And as you do that, as you say, yes, I believe this, Christ nurtures your faith in him.

So we look back, we look forward, and we look up. Fourthly, we look around. We look around as we share with our brothers and sisters. In 1 Corinthians 10, again that chapter, the next thing he says in verse 17 is, because there is one love, we who are many are one body, for we all share the one love.

Communion is a visible expression that we're brothers and sisters in Christ. So it's okay to have communion and look joyful. Sometimes we sort of head down, miserable look.

It's good to reflect, and sometimes we'll have communion and reflect personally. But if you are at communion and you're looking around joyfully, thanking God for the church family he's given you, that's a good thing.

And it's also a chance, whenever you have communion here, to ask yourself again, am I really invested in St. Silas as my church family? Am I a true member of this Christian community?

[16 : 13] Or at the moment, am I more a bit of a consumer, kind of dropping in for information and inspiration, but not really committed? It's a chance to think that. We don't just come for my communion, we come for a family meal.

Yes, we say, yes to the commitment God calls you to in our local church. Now that's a very special thing, but there is a negative side to that as well.

It means that it grieves God if we receive communion while we're acting in a way that undermines that community. And in the Corinthian church, as we've just had in our reading, communion was a mess.

Paul's writing to them, trying to straighten it out. In 1 Corinthians 11, what's going on is reading what Paul writes. They're bringing their own meals with them. They're having a whole meal, and people who've got lots of food are not sharing it, and poorer people are missing out.

So they're undermining by their actions the sense of church family. So Paul says there are divisions among them. And then let's look at chapter 11 from verse 27.

[17 : 23] So then, 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. Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup.

For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ, eat and drink judgment on themselves. That is why many among you are weak and ill, and a number of you have fallen asleep.

But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment. And we have to read that alongside the assurances in places like Romans 8.1, that if you're trusting Christ Jesus, there is no condemnation for you.

You cannot be condemned. If you're trusting him and his death for you on the cross, you will go to glory. But God can sometimes discipline his people to wake them up that he is grieved by their sinful practice so that the church or an individual wakes up and repents.

And here, that's going on in Corinth, isn't it? God is judging them, even physically, and some of them have even died. God put people to death in that church because he was so grieved by the way they were undermining the sense of church family.

[18 : 41] And this is why we have to be careful about communion. It's a very special gift for the church. Received rightly, it's a source of great encouragement. But it's also potentially dangerous to take communion in the wrong way.

And that brings us to our fifth place to look when we have communion. We look within to examine ourselves for disharmony. There's a clear command there in verse 28, isn't there?

Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink of the cup. Because if you do that without discerning the body, in other words, if you do that in a way that means you're still undermining the sense of church family, you eat and drink God's judgment on yourself.

How might we do that? Broken relationships. If you've sinned against another Christian and you've not apologized to them and sought their forgiveness, or if somebody has sinned against you and you've not gone to see them to seek reconciliation, to ask them to apologize, or if someone has apologized to you but you haven't forgiven them and you're still harboring resentment in your heart. That's why we often have the peace in our services before communion. It's not meant to just be a hug or a handshake. It's a way of saying we hold nothing against each other.

[20 : 06] We are family. If when we have the peace there is anybody in our church that you avoid, that's a big problem. Peace is a great way of expressing.

We're holding nothing against each other and so we're ready to share the family meal. And we just need a few minutes at this stage just to think a little bit about children and communion.

At St. Silas we allow parents to make up their own mind what to do with their children and that's what we're doing as a church. We're not changing that today that parents can make up their own mind what's right for them as a family. But it's this command to examine yourself that's led to lots of evangelical churches saying that it's better if children don't have communion.

There are a few views here so I'm just going to go through them well a few of them. One evangelical view is that you shouldn't baptize children until they reach an age of maturity where they've made their own profession of faith and once they've been baptized like that they can have communion.

Some people would say they should wait until they're 18 or 16 or 13 or younger than that. Some churches would say even younger than that as long as you're confident it's a real profession of faith the child's come to a decision you baptize them and communion comes after baptism.

[21 : 28] We have a large number of people at St. Silas with that view. It's an entirely reasonable view of what the Bible says. For my money it might well be right that view.

At St. Silas we baptize children if the parents are believers and would like to have their children baptized but we also dedicate children where parents think that's a more appropriate model because we want to wait for our child to make their own profession.

We're perfectly respectful of both views. But given what we're reading in 1 Corinthians 10 and 11 here I think that it's consistent with that view that you would wait until the child is baptized before you'd give them communion.

That's what I think is the consistent Baptist position. There's another view in evangelical churches that says you should baptize the children of believing parents.

They're being raised in a Christian household a Christian home where they're always going to be treated as disciples. That as they're raised they're not going to be evangelized they're going to be taught that Jesus has died for their sins and that they can call God their heavenly father and encourage to pray to God as their father from a very early age.

[22 : 43] So we'll therefore assume that they're Christians until such time as they say to us that they're not. They're in the covenant community so we give them the covenant sign of baptism.

That is the infant baptism view and that view might be right. We're not working that out today and we're not going to make it a cause of division in our church family.

The gospel is bigger than that. What we're asking is when you've baptized a child what do you then do about communion for that child? One view is that you should give the children communion because it's the family meal they've had one covenant sign why not give them the other one?

If they're baptized as an infant that does get a bit messy because you're starting to look at at what age do we kind of force bread down the throat of this child? At what age do we give them wine? So it gets a bit messy but it's a clear view and it gives communion an inclusive family feel.

But what John Calvin said and okay he's just a man right but normally if you disagree with John Calvin normally we're in the wrong. What John Calvin said and what came into the Anglican tradition was that this command in 1 Corinthians 11 to examine yourself makes communion different to baptism and that's the same view you'd get in lots of Presbyterian churches today so Tim Keller's denomination the Presbyterian Church of America if you're a Tim Keller fan that's their view as well baptism for infants but you wait until children are older and old enough to examine themselves before you give communion.

[24 : 20] It's St Silas Constitution's view because it's the Anglican Reformed view that we're willing to baptize children on the basis of their parents' faith but admission to communion is held back out of kindness until the child is old enough and mature enough that they could examine themselves before God.

How old would you have to be before that would be reasonable to examine yourself so that you're not bringing judgment on yourself? 25? 16?

6? To put an age on it is quite arbitrary isn't it? And at St Silas as I said we leave it up to parents to decide when their child is ready to receive communion.

If you're a parent and you're wondering what's the most sensible thing to do for my money the most sensible idea is 13 because 13 was the age and still is the age in the Jewish community at which a Jewish child is deemed to come in responsibility under the law.

They have their bar mitzvah at 13. So I think that's what the New Testament church would have understood as a bit of a coming of age literally was 13.

[25 : 34] The child has their own responsibilities they have a maturity now before God. And historically that's around the time when Anglicans would have what we call confirmation when a child is given the chance to think through do I really believe for myself what my parents believe so that I'm ready to start having communion as I confirm that.

So what do you do in the meantime with a child where you're waiting like that? Well then we would love you in that position to when we have communion with families in bring your children forward and the people giving out bread would be delighted to bless the children or say a prayer of blessing for each child.

Is that excluding the children? Is it saying that they're denied something as though their faith isn't quite sufficient? I don't see it like that because Jesus blessed the children that's what he did to show that the kingdom belongs to such as these he put his hands on them and he blessed them.

And whenever we have communion at St Silas we're very happy to do that coming as a family those who are mature enough and old enough having bread and wine children being blessed. Now at St Silas at the moment there's lots that's great about communion it's great it's encouraging God is blessing us with it but we've got a bit of confusion at the moment for our families because about giving out bread at communion we're giving out bread to some children and not to others and when I arrived at St Silas the previous minister said you've got to kind of deal with this thing that's going on and the bishop said to me you've got to deal with this thing that's going on with bread.

So apparently at one time bread wasn't given out Smarties were given out and that's clearly not communion but maybe that was causing other problems among the children but it was clearly not communion but when we're giving out bread some families see that as the children are having communion by having the bread and not the wine other families think that the children are having bread because they're not having communion they're just having bread and then being blessed.

[27 : 38] The problem is that in church history there's there's a difficult thing about in some churches especially in the medieval church some people weren't given wine and it was almost as a way of saying you're not you're not enough of a Christian so the priests were allowed the bread and the wine everyone else just got the bread and it kind of led to this understanding that oh the priests are the kind of first class Christians we're in economy class here we just get the bread.

So when we have communion especially at St Silas where actually we use non-alcoholic wine out of respect for people for whom alcohols are struggle so in that kind of scenario I think it really should be bread and wine if you're having communion or nothing.

So there's a lot here for families to reflect on and our children are about to come back in and you won't have had the chance to talk to them about any of this if they're your children feel free to do what you normally do let's not confuse the children and if going forward you think it would discourage your child spiritually not to get given a piece of bread when they come up with you for bread and wine they can still have it.

I'm anxious to ensure that nobody is spiritually discouraged by us trying to straighten out how we do communion. But I hope that after today our St Silas families you can talk together with your children about the Lord's Supper and talk and pray with your child and if you're confident with your child that they've reached a stage of maturity and professing faith that they could examine themselves in that 1 Corinthians 11 way let's think about whether it's time to give them bread and wine not just bread and give them communion.

If you think your child should wait until they're a bit more mature then maybe you could talk to them about how it maybe seems better for them not to have bread but to come up and be prayed for and have a blessing prayer when we have communion.

[29 : 38] And what we're going to do in our youth team Emily and the youth team are going to start having class having sessions with our young people when they hit secondary school so S1 that kind of 12-13 age that will be a point at which we'll we'll do some sessions about communion so that the young people at that stage heading from primary into secondary school can think a bit more about is now the time in my life is this faith my own and am I do I feel mature enough that I could share in communion?

That seems a good time to help young people think about what communion is all about but in doing that we'll be making clear to any young people who don't think they're quite ready that that's fine that's a mature thing to say and they're still hugely welcome in our church family even if they think well I'm not ready to have bread and wine that's okay.

So where have we got to? When we share the Lord's Supper we look back to our amazing deliverance we look forward with assurance to the coming feast we look up and feed on Christ in our hearts we look around as we share the family meal we look within and examine ourselves and finally we look out as Christ's instruments to change the world.

When we feed on Christ at communion and we say yes to him we should be filled with awe and thanksgiving and God sends us out from the table to worship him out in the city with our whole lives not in fear that oh I've got to try and work my way into God's righteousness no we go out assured again afresh that Jesus has paid it all and we're his forgiven children empowered by his spirit to witness to him.

So communion is an instrument of transformation not just for our benefit but for the benefit of Glasgow that we can go out from here transformed not by magic but by the Holy Spirit bringing about transformation through this process we go through of self-examination confession drawing near with faith and feeding on Christ in our hearts and God sends us out into the world inspired we've seen the love of Christ portrayed to us and we're left to ask how am I portraying that love of Christ to the people of Glasgow who I'll see this week in other words received rightly communion can mould us into world changes let's pray together heavenly father we thank you for the gift of the Lord's Supper as we come to the table now as a church family may you work in us what's pleasing to you strengthening us in faith assuring us of our hope and transforming us in our love for you and for each other that the city of Glasgow and the whole earth might be brought through our witness to know the redemption that comes in Christ for the praise of his glorious grace

[32 : 38] Amen