

# ***GOD'S WONDERFUL LITTLE DINNER PARTY IDEA!***

I Corinthians 11:17-34

## INTRODUCTION:

- A. When you are a kid, adult church isn't the most exciting thing you do all week. I was just like any other kid. In the early years, church was pretty boring for me. But we Walton kids had to really toe the line because of my Mom. She watched us like a hawk for any misbehavior in church. Now she always disapproved of people disrupting church by overtly swatting at their kids, so she developed a stealth method of enforcement. First of all, she planned ahead. She and Dad sat in the middle of the 5 Walton kids so we were all within reach. If there were any infraction, she would lean slightly, reach over, and give us a sharp pinch on the lower soft side of the thigh. I still remember how much that hurt!
- B. I remember one time I got it. To relieve church boredom I brought a paperback from home that I was reading called, *The Green Turtle Mystery*. I knew my folks wouldn't let me read it in church. Even the newspaper comics were off limits until Sunday afternoon. So I tucked the book inside my Bible and for the first time in church looked like I was really paying attention and tracking with the preacher. My mom was so proud of me! Until she unfortunately caught a glimpse of something that didn't look like Holy Writ. Away went the book and, behold, the maternal pinch!
- C. If you're a kid who is bored in church, and all of a sudden the ushers start passing out food and drink, suddenly things are looking up. The communion part of church always had me on the edge of my seat. The bit of cracker was every bit as miraculous to me in a dry church service as manna was to the Israelites in the desert. The tiny cup of grape juice was the water Moses brought out of the rock at Massah. And I knew I was just as thirsty as the wandering children of God.
- D. *Can I have some?* I whispered to Mom. *We'll talk about it later.* She replied. Sadly I watched the tray go by. She got some. Dad got some. I got none. On the way home I got the talk: *When you can explain to us what communion really means, then you can have some.* That was one research assignment I meant to accomplish with no delay.
- E. Our Bible passage today explains to us all about what communion really means. And we're going to see that not just kids need this information. The verses we will read today were written to a bunch of grownups who needed a good hard pinch in church and Paul happens to be the guy who gets to give it to them. While they are getting pinching, let's see what we can learn about the meaning of Communion and how to behave appropriately while we're doing it.

## I. IT'S ABOUT NON-DISCRIMINATION (Verses 17-22)

- A. Bread and Juice Do Not Communion Make
  - 1. What was going wrong in Corinth?
    - *In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. 18 In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are **divisions** among you, and to some extent I believe it. 19 No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval. 20 When you come together, it is **not the Lord's Supper** you eat, 21 for as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else. One remains hungry, another gets drunk. 22 Don't you have homes 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 praise you for this? Certainly not!*
    - According to Jude 12 (*These men are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm--shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted--twice dead.*) the habit of the

early church was to hold love feasts. It appears that these meals often or always ended with a Communion Service. That's what was going on here in Corinth.

- But the upper class people were treating the lower class people with prejudice. There was a hard line drawn in their communion services between the *haves* and the *have nots*. The rich got stuffed and drunk. The poor went home hungry and embarrassed.
  - Think of mom knocking herself out to prepare a big Thanksgiving meal for her family. All the kids are their, their spouses, all the grandkids. She's so pleased to have all the people she loves together for this holiday celebration. But when everybody sits down to the table, they get into a big argument. One of the wives gets up from the table and leaves the room crying. One of men slams his chair back and stomps out. People leave early. The pumpkin pies never get out of the refrigerator. How do you think mom feels? Was this a Thanksgiving meal celebration? No, it was not. And mom's heart is broken.
2. The Lord's Supper is much like a happy family Thanksgiving meal. It's really not fundamentally about the turkey and the pumpkin pie. It is about gratitude to God and it is about warm and loving relationships. If it was just about food, you could go by yourself to Royal Fork and eat yourself silly.
  3. That's what was going wrong at Corinth. They had forgotten that The Lord's Supper was about warm and loving relationships and that it was about gratitude to God for saving their souls.

B. Love Validates Communion

1. How relationships permeate The Lord's Supper
  - The Lord's Supper is not drive-thru fast food. It is more like a family sit-down meal.
  - The family of God is not about how smart you are or how rich you are or how slow you are or how poor you are. It is about *Family*. Let me illustrate this with a story. It's from **Stephem Ambrose**, who writes a lot about World War II. He tells about Webster. *He was a Harvard intellectual.... He was a man of books and libraries, a reader and a writer, sensitive, level-headed, keenly observant, thoughtful, well-educated. Here he was thrown into the most intimate contact...with ill-educated hillbillies, Southern farmers, coal miners, lumbermen, fishermen, and so on among most of the enlisted men in the company....*

*Yet it was among this unlikely group of men that Webster found his closest friendships and enjoyed most thoroughly the sense of identification with others.*

Webster had been wounded and gotten separated from his buddies. Through sheer persistence he got back to his company, "*It was good to be back with fellows I knew and could trust. Listening to their chatter in the truck, I felt warm and relaxed inside, like a lost child who had returned to a bright home full of love after wandering in a cold black forest.*" (Stephen Ambrose, *The Victors*, Simon and Schuster, NY, NY, 1998, 291-292)

2. How to love God by loving people
  - **I John 4:20**, *If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. 21 And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother.*
  - Communion is a reality check on our personal world of relationships. There is something about those intimate moments of holding that little cup of grape juice and staring at your reflection in the purple surface that has a way of waking you up to any hypocrisy and hurtfulness in your life. It's sort

of like what Jesus said about an Israelite bringing a sacrifice to God at the temple: **Matthew 5:23**, "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift.

- Communion is about heart-obedience to the two greatest commandments in the Bible: *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind; and love your neighbor as yourself.* (**Matthew 22:36-40**)

II. IT'S ABOUT VALUING JESUS' DEATH (Verses 23-26, *For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 24 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." 25 In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." 26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*)

A. What Is the Meaning of the Symbols? [The bread and wine]

1. Well, that's been hotly debated through the centuries. The debate sorts out into three schools of thought:

- ❑ Transubstantiation. This is the view of the Catholic Church. When Jesus said, *This is my body*, Catholic theologians take it literally. When the priest prays over the wafer and the goblet, Catholics believe that the wafer and the wine really are transformed into the physical body and blood of Jesus. The fact that it still looks and tastes like bread and wine is a *mere veil that deceives the senses*. (Erwin Lutzer, "Deserving of Tears," *Moody*, February, 1984, 127) That's why for many centuries only the priest ate and drank the elements for fear that the lay people might spill or drop the blood and body of Jesus. It created quite a stir *on Christmas Day 1521 when 2,000 people assembled in the Castle Church [in Wittenberg] and Carstadt, an associate of Luther, distributed both the bread and the wine for the congregation.* (Lutzer, 127)
- ❑ Consubstantiation. When Martin Luther broke from the Catholic church in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, he revised his view of Communion. He moved away from transubstantiation, but retained a modified view of the physical presence of the blood and body of Jesus. He taught that the bread and wine were real bread and wine and were not mysteriously changed. But he believed that in some mysterious sense, the body and blood of Jesus hovered around the physical elements of communion. He also believed that in the act of eating communion, divine grace was infused into the individual's life.
- ❑ Symbolic. Zwingli of Switzerland disagreed. He taught that when Jesus said to his disciples, *This is my body*, He didn't really mean that the bread was His body. After all, the body of Jesus was sitting there and holding the bread! Zwingli said the bread and wine were symbolic. The bread is a symbol of the body of Jesus and the wine is a symbol of the blood of Jesus. Hot stuff this was. In the 1540's Luther and Zwingli debated the issue in a formal meeting at Marburg Castle in Germany. They came to no agreement; indeed Luther *even inferred that the Swiss were not brothers in Christ.* According to the church historian Philip Schaff, *after the debate, Zwingli approached Luther with tears and held out a hand of brotherhood, but Luther declined it.* (Lutzer, 127)

2. Let's go back to where the whole thing started. It was at a Jewish Passover Meal.

- ❑ The Passover Story is in Exodus 12. Pharaoh wouldn't let Israel go. After 400 years God said it was time for His children to come home to the Promised Land, but Pharaoh didn't want to give up all his cheap labor. So God decided to throw one more deciding judgment at the Egyptians: the

death of all their firstborn sons. The evening before God sent a death angel to kill the firstborn in every Egyptian household, He instructed the Israelites in the Passover ritual. They were to sacrifice, roast and eat a lamb in every Israelite household. And they were supposed to smear the blood from the lamb on the doorposts and the lintel of all their doors. God said that when the death angels saw the blood on the door, he would “pass over” that house. No one would die there.

- ❑ This stunning meal became an annual memorial feast, in fact, the most holy of all the Jewish feasts. **Exodus 12:14**, *"This is a day you are to commemorate; for the generations to come you shall celebrate it as a festival to the LORD--a lasting ordinance.*
- ❑ We Christians call it the Last Supper. It was the last meal Jesus ate with His disciples the evening before he was arrested and crucified. Jesus and the disciples were actually eating the traditional Jewish Passover meal. But toward the end of the meal, Jesus did something unexpected. Jesus put a twist in the meal that lifted it to a new level. He did something that unwrapped a hidden meaning that the Passover had pointed to but no one had ever understood. Jesus revealed that the Passover was really, ultimately about Him. Jesus was the greater Lamb.
- ❑ **I Corinthians 5:7**, *Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.*
- ❑ For 35 centuries the Jews have celebrated the Passover. For 20 centuries Christians have celebrated the Lord's Supper. For the Jews, since the destruction of the Jerusalem temple in AD 70, the lamb has been absent from the Passover meal. For the Christian, the Lamb is the unseen the host - the Lamb who takes away the sin of the world; the One who said, *"I am the first and the last and the Living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and Hades."* (**Revelation 1:17-18**)
- ❑ For Christians, the value of the death of Jesus is so profound, that we have a regular Supper at which we celebrate it. Now, you might think that it is a strange thing to celebrate a death, and normally it would be. But the death of Jesus was different from all other deaths. It was not an end; a demise, a defeat. It was a victory. By His death, Jesus conquered the Devil, He conquered sin, He conquered death. And, here's the really good news, He made it possible for us sinners to be saved and get to heaven!

3. So who should take Communion?

- ❑ Believers. It just doesn't make sense to take communion if you don't believe in Jesus as your Savior.
- ❑ Open vs. closed Communion. Communion isn't about our individual church. It is about the family of God. If you know Jesus as your Savior, even if you are a one-time visitor here today, you are most welcome to share in Communion with us.
- ❑ Age. Help your children wait to take Communion until they can adequately articulate to you that they understand what it means and that they have trusted Jesus as their Savior. And help them wait until they understand that Communion is not treats in church, but an act of worship to Jesus.

B. What Is the Message of the Event?

1. Proclamation of the Lord's death (Verse 26)

- ❑ The ultimate sacrifice. Jesus said it well, **John 15:13**, *Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.*
- ❑ Death was prominent in the Old Testament:
  - Birds
  - Bulls
  - Heifers
  - Goats

- Lambs
- Prevalence of blood
- Blood is prominent in the New Testament:
  - **I Peter 1:18**, *For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.*
  - *There is a fountain filled with blood, drawn from Emmanuel's veins. And sinner plunged beneath that flood lose all their guilty stain.* Rather graphic, those words, don't you think? There's not really a fountain. Jesus' blood was not surgically drawn from Jesus' veins. It wasn't a flood. The volume was measured in pints. But give the author a break. Grant him some poetic license. The blood of Jesus was spilled for our sins. Because of His death as my substitute, I can be saved by simply trusting in Him!
  - At the core of Christianity there is Death. Without death there is no life. But the only death that really changed anything is the death of Christ. The death of Christ was so unique that in dying He unmade death.
- Death is a universal problem. Death is not a question of "If" but a question of "When."
  - **Woody Allen** said, *I don't want to achieve immortality through my work, I want to achieve it through not dying.*
  - **Dr. David Schiedermayer** was at the bedside of a dying Navajo man. *The room is still. Death pulls him away, and I turn toward his family. I begin to speak of his disease and his death. But even as I try to talk to Mr. Tsosie's wife and sister, I see an amazing thing. At the moment they perceive his death, they physically turn away from him in horror and fear. And they will not speak of him again. For the traditional Navajo, death is the ultimate void.* (David Schiedermayer, "Commuting to the Valley of the Shadow of Death," *Christianity Today*, Oct. 4, 1993, 34)
- 2. Jesus died so that we can live. That's the great message of Communion: *For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you **proclaim the Lord's death** until he comes.*

III. IT'S ABOUT PERSONAL HONESTY (Verses 27-34, *Therefore, 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. 28 A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. 29 For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. 30 That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. 31 But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. 32 When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world. 33 So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for each other. 34 If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment. And when I come I will give further directions.*)

A. Recognize That This Is a Dangerous Dinner

1. What was dangerous about it in the First Century?
  - There was something pretty creepy going on here. People who messed up in The Lord's Supper were getting physically sick and some of them had actually died.
  - One Pastor tells this true story, *A recent convert was taken aback by a barbed comment an older believer had aimed at him. He came running to me for help.*

*“Pastor, I didn’t get this stuff in the bar. Down there they don’t criticize you continually. They accept your drinking problem, or your divorce – and maybe they’ll buy you another round to cheer you up. Why can’t the church be a bar without booze?”*

*Just that morning I had glanced at the police column in our local newspaper. Three people had been injured in bar fights the night before. Fists, knives, and, in one case, a crowbar had been sued. I told him, “Brother, we may not be perfect here, but at least you don’t end up in the hospital when you leave.” (author?, “Fatal Reaction: Antidotes to PK Poisoning,” *Leadership Journal*, Fall, 1992, 30-31)*

- ❑ Except in Corinth. People were ending up in the hospital or the morgue right after the church communion service!

2. Is it really dangerous today?

- ❑ Take a parallel:

- Acts 5: Ananias and Sapphira. They lied about their charitable giving at church and the Holy Spirit struck them both dead. I’m sure lots of church people make false claims about their charitable giving, but I’ve never heard of anybody dying over it. Maybe an IRS audit. Who knows, maybe God is just turning dishonest Christians over to the IRS instead of killing them directly. Now that I think about it, perhaps a bolt from heaven would be more merciful than an audit.
- In the First Century, Jesus and His Apostles were walking around healing people of serious, visible illnesses right out in the streets, by the hundreds! These great miracles were God’s way of waking everybody up to the fact that this Jesus really was the Son of God and that they had better listen to Him.
- I don’t see that happening today, not like was Jesus and Peter and Paul did.
- These sicknesses in Corinth I assume were part of God’s First Century protocol. God was still laying down the standards and authority of Christianity to that first generation of witnesses. Now that is done. The written record stands. I don’t see people getting and dying after communion services, and I don’t think that’s because we are all that more holy than the Corinthians were.
- But just because God isn’t withering communicants’ bodies doesn’t mean that we can or should be careless about this business.
- We are still dealing with the God of the Universe. This is still about the bodily sacrifice of Jesus Christ, Lord of Lord, King of Kings, Savior of our souls. This little meal deserves great reverence.

B. Recognize Your Sinfulness

1. What is “an unworthy manner”?

- Anything that trivializes or betrays the meaning of the Lord’s Supper.
- Unresolved strife among Christians
- Hypocrisy
- Foolishness
- Empty ritual

2. Are any of us worthy?

- ❑ The church of Jesus Christ is the only institution in the world for which the main admission requirement is the applicant’s recognition of his/her utter unworthiness.
- ❑ My resume’/application for Mountain Rescue. I had to list all my pertinent training and all resume of experience. I had to attend 3 monthly meetings before I would be considered. I was sent out of the room so they could talk

about me and then was called back in to be informed of the group's decision.

- ❑ We will never be worthy of this Communion meal and the great spiritual grace that it symbolizes.
- ❑ But we can be sure that we don't approach it thoughtlessly, trivially, hypocritically.

CONCLUSION:

- A. *Brennan Manning tells the story of a man named Ed Farrell, who traveled from his home in Detroit to spend a two-week vacation in Ireland to celebrate his uncle's eightieth birthday. When the great day dawned, Ed and his uncle rose early to greet the sun. They walked along the shores of Lake Killarney, loving the emerald green grass and crystal blue waters. For twenty minutes they watched the scene together in silence. Then the uncle began to do an unusual thing for an eighty-year-old man: He began to skip along the shore of the lake, smiling like a schoolboy in love. Ed was puffing hard as he tried to catch up to him.*  
*"Uncle Seamus, you look very happy. Do you want to tell me why?"*  
*"Yes," said the old man, tears running down his face. "You see, the Father is very fond of me. Ah, the Father is so very fond of me." (John Ortberg, Everybody's Normal Till You Get to Know Them, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 2003, 41)*
- B. In fact, He is so fond of us that He invites us to eat at His table.

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