

“Eat This Bread and Drink This Cup” (1 Corinthians 11:17–34)(5.1.22)

SCRIPTURE INTRO: Before I read the scripture, it is helpful for you to know that in the early days of the church, The Lord’s Supper was celebrated after the Love Feast. The Love Feast was kind of like a pot-luck dinner and was supposed to build community and provide for the many poor and many slaves in the church.

1 Corinthians 11:17–34 (NIV84) *The Lord’s Supper*

¹⁷In 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!

²³For 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.

²⁷Therefore, 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.

³³So 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.

The word of God for the people of God.

LET US PRAY.

Title: **“Eat This Bread and Drink This Cup”**

INTRODUCTION:

Early in my tenure here at Emmaus Church, there was a younger woman who visited and worshiped with us. Immediately she started getting involved. Very soon after she started there was a festival at Historic Smithville and she volunteered to help with the parking.

Someone had arranged for there to be sandwiches available for the parking workers. The sandwiches were put in the kitchen for people to help themselves. While this woman was in the kitchen, she witnessed a disagreement between two of our long-standing members. Apparently, it was bitter enough to cause this woman to stop coming. I followed up with her and she said that kind of non-Christian behavior was why she found it hard to be part of a church. Although I reached out to her several times, it was of no avail.

Have there been other times when we as a church have done more harm than good? Over the years, I have learned of longstanding divisions that still lie simmering below the surface. Of course, we are

all human and we all make mistakes; but, we are to be people of grace; peacemakers; a loving people; a holy people. Today, as we celebrate Holy Communion, I want us to pray for us to be a unified Body of Christ.

BODY:

One area that many churches create divisions in the celebration of the Lord's supper is by excluding children. Generally speaking, the Catholic Church does not allow children to participate until the "age of reason," which is considered seven years old. In many Protestant denominations, they exclude anyone, including children, that has not made a public confession of faith. They are sincere in their rationale and believe there is scriptural support for their position.

What does the Bible say about children at the Communion Table? They are not mentioned one way or the other. There is no reason to assume children were not there. In fact, the natural assumption is that they were. Many churches exclude children because they have not received a believer's baptism because they are not old enough to make that decision.

Do we tell children not to worship because they don't understand God? Most adults, maybe all adults, do not have a full understanding of God.

We don't stop children from praying. We don't stop children from singing. We don't stop children from reading their Bibles or hear us reading the Bible. We don't stop children from giving. NO! We encourage all those things. Why? Because they help the child grow into their faith.

The idea of a believer's baptism is rooted in individualism, a fairly modern and Western way of thinking. Yes, there is no doubt that every individual person must be born again, born from above. Every one of us must commit to the Lordship of Jesus in our lives. But, we must not dismiss the centrality of family to the child. And, the Christian community that surrounds the child is an ally of the family to bring the child to faith. Can't we see that this is the reason that Satan targets the family structure?

Remember when Paul and Silas were locked in the Philippian jail with their feet in stocks. Acts 16:25–26 (NIV84)

²⁵About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. ²⁶Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everybody's chains came loose.

Acts 16:29–34 (NIV84)

²⁹The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. ³⁰He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

³¹They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." ³²Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. ³³At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his family were baptized. ³⁴The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole family.

Acts 10:30–33 (NIV84)

³⁰Cornelius answered: "Four days ago I was in my house praying at this hour, at three in the afternoon. Suddenly a man in shining clothes stood before me ³¹and said, 'Cornelius, God has heard your prayer and remembered your gifts to the poor. ³²Send to Joppa for Simon who is called Peter. He is a guest in the home of Simon the tanner, who lives by the sea.' ³³So I sent for you immediately, and it was good of you to come. Now **we are all here** in the presence of God to listen to everything the Lord has commanded you to tell us."

Then Peter shares the good news, the gospel of Jesus.

Acts 10:44–48 (NIV84)

⁴⁴ While Peter was still speaking these words, the Holy Spirit came on all who heard the message.⁴⁵ The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astonished that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles.⁴⁶ For they heard them speaking in tongues and praising God.

Then Peter said,⁴⁷ “Can anyone keep these people from being baptized with water? They have received the Holy Spirit just as we have.”⁴⁸ So he ordered that they be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked Peter to stay with them for a few days.

These passages emphasize a group identity: family, household, community. Children are integral and nowhere does scripture suggest their exclusion from these groups. And, let us not forget Jesus’ admonition in Matthew 19:13–15 (NIV84)
The Little Children and Jesus

¹³ Then little children were brought to Jesus for him to place his hands on them and pray for them. But the disciples rebuked those who brought them.

¹⁴ Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these."¹⁵ When he had placed his hands on them, he went on from there.

The United Methodist Church places no age or membership restriction on participation in Holy Communion. This principle is affirmed by statements in The United Methodist Book of Worship and By Water and the Spirit, our statement on the meaning and practice of baptism. The Book of Worship states, "All who intend to lead a Christian life, together with their children, are invited to receive the bread and cup." By Water and the Spirit similarly claims, "Because the table at which we gather belongs to the Lord, it should be open to all who respond to Christ's love, regardless of age or church membership." We therefore have a responsibility "to provide ongoing age-appropriate nurture and education" about the sacraments to persons of all ages.

Likewise, the grace given through Holy Communion is offered to the entire church, including those who are unable to respond for themselves. Children are members of the covenant community and participants in the Lord's Supper.

As Methodists, we adhere to Wesleyan theology. John Wesley, though widely read and also the

author of many books, called himself a man of one book, the Bible. Wesleyan theology is his understanding of scripture. He taught, and as a Methodist preacher, so do I, that The Lord's Supper is a "means of grace." God works through Holy Communion to advance His work in our hearts and minds – sanctifying us – forming us into His image.

Many other Protestants do not share this perspective. One prominent mega-church pastor wrote a sermon on the Lord's Supper that I read this week. I admire this pastor and have enjoyed some of his books, but we don't agree on several theological issues. Here is an excerpt from that sermon:

"This is why I want to camp out here for these couple of minutes, because I want us to realize that what we're doing in the Lord's Supper is not obtaining grace. Grace is grace because it is not obtainable. You don't earn it. You don't do anything to receive it. It is given. That's why it's grace. It's given freely and why faith is the God ordained means for salvation. It is because that it doesn't involve what we do. It is faith in what He has done. He has lived the life we could not live. He has died a death as a substitute on our behalf on our behalf, so that when we trust in Him, His righteousness is granted to us. It is beautiful,

marvelous grace, and as soon as we add one step to do this in order to receive grace, then we undercut grace.

So, in the Lord's Supper, what we're doing is we're not receiving Christ. We're not receiving grace that's being infused into us. We're celebrating grace that has radically transformed us. This is a biblical understanding: A symbolic meal that reflects salvation. "

So, he adamantly disagrees with the whole concept of the Lord's Supper being a means of grace. Many elements of what he said are absolutely true and I agree with him. But, I think he is missing something and this is partly because he dismisses the human variable in the equation.

Consider this: Not so long ago, our car radios were analog instead of digital. We tuned them by hand. Let us say there was a radio station W-Grace. It was always broadcasting its heavenly music and messages. Unless you tuned your radio to the proper frequency of W-Grace, you could not receive the heavenly music and messages. It was there and available, but you would be oblivious.

Now, let us make a comparison. One person is at a Phillie's baseball game up in Philadelphia. They are cheering on the team, talking to their friends, and

eating hotdogs and pretzels with mustard while drinking their favorite beverage.

A second person is here in our sanctuary. They have examined themselves. They have confessed their sin and acknowledged the forgiveness they have received because of Jesus' death on the cross. In eating the bread and drinking from the cup, they are remembering Jesus. Not only do they remember Jesus' death, they remember that Jesus is alive. And, they look forward to Jesus' return to consummate His Kingdom.

What do you think? Who has tuned into W-Grace? In which case will the grace of God be more active?

Our participation in the Lord's Supper is an act of obedience, a response to Jesus' command at His Last Supper. If you remember the Parable of the Sower, it was the "good soil" that was productive and lasting. I suggest to you that whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup, we are preparing ourselves as good soil.

We can tell from this first letter to the Corinthians that the Apostle Paul makes it clear that it is a very serious matter. It is not just a ritual. We should not just go through the motions without considering its true meaning; not be casual or

cavalier about partaking in the body and blood of the Lord Jesus.

We must understand that this is a special gift. We are to see the bread and juice (wine) as representing Jesus' body and its sacredness. Recognizing the body of the Lord, or discerning the body of the Lord, may also refer to the church – the body of believers. Considering this is a letter to the whole Corinthian Church, and Paul's call to unity over divisions, there is a good argument for it referring to the church body. Here is more support for this concept. In the previous chapter Paul writes:

1 Corinthians 10:16–17 (NIV84)

¹⁶Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?¹⁷ Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.

Probably, Paul deliberately intertwines these two ideas.

Failure in this matter brings judgment, judgment in the form of weakness, sickness, and even death. This is hard to hear and it offends our modern sensibilities. Hebrews chapter 12 makes it very

clear that the Lord disciplines us because He loves us as His children.

CONCLUSION:

So, let us examine ourselves. Let us remember all that Jesus is and has done as the Christ. Let us look forward to His Second Coming. Let us remember that we are a member of the Body of Christ, with Jesus as our Head.

[Here, O My Lord, I See Thee Face to Face](#)

A poem and hymn By **Horatius Bonar**

Here, O my Lord, I see Thee face to face;
Here would I touch and handle things unseen;
Here grasp with firmer hand eternal grace,
And all my weariness upon Thee lean.

This is the hour of banquet and of song;
This is the heavenly table spread for me;
Here let me feast, and feasting, still prolong
The hallowed hour of fellowship with Thee.

Here would I feed upon the bread of God,
Here drink with Thee the royal wine of Heaven;
Here would I lay aside each earthly load,
Here taste afresh the calm of sin forgiven.

I have no help but Thine; nor do I need
Another arm save Thine to lean upon;
It is enough, my Lord, enough indeed;
My strength is in Thy might, Thy might alone.

I have no wisdom save in Him Who is
My Wisdom and my Teacher both in One;
No wisdom can I lack while Thou art wise;
No teaching do I crave save Thine alone.

Mine is the sin, but Thine the righteousness:
Mine is the guilt, but Thine the cleansing blood;
Here is my robe, my refuge, and my peace;
Thy Blood, Thy righteousness, O Lord my God!

Too soon we rise; the symbols disappear;
The feast, though not the love, is past and gone.
The bread and wine remove; but Thou art here,
Nearer than ever, still my Shield and Sun.

Feast after feast thus comes and passes by;
Yet, passing, points to the glad feast above,
Giving sweet foretaste of the festal joy,
The Lamb's great bridal feast of bliss and love.

Amen and amen. Let us pray.