

Exegetical Notes – 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

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Introduction: In 1 Corinthians 10:31, Paul lays down the great principle which governs the life of every believer, **“DO IT ALL FOR THE GLORY OF GOD.”** Whatever a Christian does must be done to bring God glory. In chapter 11:2 through 14:40, Paul’s main concern is public worship. Certainly everything which is done in Christian worship should bring glory to God.

1 Corinthians 11:17-34

Verses 17-22

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 So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord’s Supper you eat, ²¹ for when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another gets drunk. ²² Don’t you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? Certainly not in this matter!

- Paul’s discussion on public worship began in 1 Corinthians 11:2. He begins by praising the Corinthians for “remembering him and for holding to the teachings he has given them.” Having started with praise, he now turns to concerns he has about the practice of public worship in Corinth.
- He first addresses the division which exists in the Corinthian Church (see Chapters 1 through 4). These factions are evident in the church when it gathers to worship. In worship, people sit with those with whom they agree and shun those with whom they do not agree. There is good in this! You can tell who is who by the group with whom they associate in worship. You can clearly see who is living to the glory of God and who is serving some more perverse cause.

- This was most obvious when the church ate the Lord's Supper. Remember that the early Christians ate the Lord's Supper in the context of a full meal, not as the symbolic meal we eat today. They began worship with a fellowship meal. They brought the food with them to share. It was a kind of "covered dish" meal. The problem was that the Corinthians sat in "friendship groups" to eat the meal. They ate with those with whom they agreed and shared the food they brought only with the members of their group. As soon as their group gathered, they began to eat with their group not waiting for the other members of the church to arrive. They did not share with those not of their group. Some groups had more than enough. Some groups had very little. However, there was no sharing.
- Paul emphatically condemns this behavior! He rhetorically asks whose supper the Corinthians are eating because what they are doing dishonors Christ. They are not following Jesus' example in this at all.

Verses 23-26

²³ 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.

- Paul explains that he gave them the very words of Jesus concerning the Lord's Supper. Out of the context of the meal they were eating, Jesus said to the disciples gathered with him in the upper room, "This is my body which is for you" and "this cup is the new covenant in my blood, drink it in remembrance of Me." He said that the purpose of the meal was to "remember Him" and the example He was setting for them. He was about to lay down His life to save them. They were to do the same for others following His example, and the Lord's Supper was to be the sign of their commitment to Him.

Verses 27-32

²⁷ 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. ²⁸ Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. ²⁹ For those who eat and drink without discerning the body

of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves.³⁰ That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.³¹ But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment.³² Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world.

- Paul says that taking the Lord's Supper without considering its meaning sins against the body and blood of Jesus. He means that behavior which ignores the example and the teaching of Jesus dishonors God and brings judgment rather than blessing.
- Before eating the Lord's Supper, Christians should look at themselves critically to be certain that they are surrendered to Jesus and his teachings. Not to do so brings judgment upon the one who eats and drinks but is not surrendered to Christ.
- Verse 30 appears to be controversial. Paul says that those who are not in a proper relationship with Jesus make themselves weak and sick and that some have died because of it. But the statement is not controversial at all. Those who deny Christ, those who do not surrender to Christ, those who do it their way and not His, suffer for their choice. Salvation is found in no other name. Life is found only in Jesus. To intentionally ignore Him is self-condemnation. If we choose Jesus we will not suffer this condemnation.
- God's purpose, however, is not to condemn but to save. He would bring the whole world to Himself. He allows our sickness and pain as a way of calling us to Him.

Verses 33-34

³³ So then, my brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat, you should all eat together.³⁴ Anyone who is hungry should eat something at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment.

And when I come I will give further directions.

- So, to honor God and surrender to Him, the Corinthians should put away their differences and eat the Lord's Supper together. If they are unable to do so, they should stay home and not eat the Lord's Supper at all. Better not to eat it than to be condemned for eating it without being surrendered to Christ.

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