

Christlike Communion

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Now in giving these instructions I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you. Therefore, when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? I do not praise you (1 Corinthians 11:17-22).

From its earliest beginnings, the church established fellowship through shared meals as a primary time to build unity (**Acts 2:42, 46**). Jude alludes to these meals as "love feasts" (**Jude 1:12**). Ignatius of Antioch notes in a letter to the congregation at Smyrna the connection between the Lord's Supper and "love feasts," saying, "You should regard that Eucharist as valid which is celebrated either by the bishop or by someone he authorizes. Without the bishop's supervision, no baptisms or love feasts are permitted."

Paul's message to the congregation at Corinth stems from this connection between a love feast and the Lord's Supper. In pattern with Christ's having instituted it during a meal, the brethren appear to have incorporated communion with the eating of a meal. Interestingly, Paul does not concern himself with their having communed in connection with a meal. Instead, his concern had to do with the way they treated one another during this meal.

Several congregations I meet with participate in semi-regular love feasts. We called them basket dinners in Bloomfield because everyone brought their food in a basket. As a young boy, I can remember being especially excited to enjoy exceptional homemade chicken nuggets prepared by one of the ladies. It wasn't just the children who enjoyed them, as several adults also looked forward to them. Imagine, for a moment, the reaction if one of us children had decided to take them all, leaving none for the rest. Paul described it as some going hungry and others getting drunk in **verse 21**. Their attitude was, "Oh, you wanted that last nugget. Too bad, it's mine."

Brethren in Corinth divided themselves into factions. The important ones and the less important ones. The ones deserving of the extra helping, and the ones going hungry. Paul alluded to these factions earlier in the book (**1:12, 4:6-8**), and in the passage above, he pointed to the harmful impact of this divisiveness on their love for one another.

Paul, therefore, continued in his effort to repair unity among them by pointing to the uniting force responsible for their fellowship as children of God. In **1 Corinthians 11:23-28**, Paul highlights the Lord's Supper, its origins with Christ, its purpose in remembering Jesus, proclaiming Jesus, and examining oneself. Its goal is to put us back in our place. We all need the same body and blood of our Lord. Together, then, we remember the love expressed, we proclaim in a unified voice the blessed savior, and we examine ourselves in relation to him.

They weren't doing this, and so they would be judged for "not discerning the Lord's body." They couldn't see how Christ's body and blood made them one together. "For this reason, many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged" (**1 Corinthians 11:30-31**). It wasn't supposed to be about them and their glory. These feasts were to be about the glorifying God. God's children are to joyously remember Christ's sacrifice and feast together in communal love through his example.

Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment (1 Corinthians 11:33-34).

Traditionally, we don't combine communion and "love feasts" as they once did, and there don't seem to be scriptures requiring this or excluding it. However, both events are significant anchors for developing love for one another. As we serve God together, it is to be done through the shared table, whether sharing the bread and the wine or sharing the food in our baskets. God designed this brilliantly for his people to

invite them to experience one another's value and thereby grow in their ability to show him love. *"Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another"* (**1 John 4:11**).

That love is only evident when we *"wait for one another."* Whether it be for the Lord's Supper or a *"love feast,"* we are to think about and plan for each other's needs ahead of our own. These moments of communion should be times to put into practice the example of our Lord. Even though deserving of great glory, he humbled himself in obedience to serve man (**Philippians 2:5-11**). Therefore, none of us ought to see ourselves as more important than another. *"in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself"* (**Philippians 2:3**). We are the servants of God. No one is ahead of others, and nobody is taking all the chicken nuggets.