

# SPIRITUAL TRANSFORMATION IS A SOCIAL PROCESS III

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## INTRODUCTION

How would you feel if you found someone using your toothbrush to scrub the toilet? How would you feel if you found someone tearing the pages from your favorite book to start a fire? How would you feel if a person used the occasion of your birthday party to make sales pitches to your guests?

The common thread in each of these examples is that the purpose of the item or event is being violated and the person related to the item or event is being violated. If you grasp this idea, then you're prepared to better understand the Apostle Paul's severe criticism of his beloved church of Corinth.

The focus of his criticism was their practice of a ritual called "the Lord's supper". Not much detail is given in the passage, but we can piece together that it was a communal meal attended by the members of the congregation and that it was a "bring your own meal" type of affair – what we would call a "potluck".

As we turn to 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, think with me along two lines: one line of thought has to do with the social aspect of our individual spiritual transformation. That is, as Christ is formed in us, our social relationships must and will change. In this passage, think about the social issues about which the Apostle Paul was confronting the church and how things ought to be between the brothers and sisters in the church. The second line of thought is in regard to the ritual of the Lord's supper and how we are to practice this ritual.

### **The Lord's Supper: a time to despise and humiliate one another?!**

#### 1 Corinthians 11:17-22

<sup>17</sup>But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. <sup>18</sup>For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, <sup>19</sup>for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. <sup>20</sup>When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. <sup>21</sup>For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. <sup>22</sup>What! Do you not have houses 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 commend you in this? No, I will not.

**(English Standard Version)**

Paul rebuked the church for two things when they gathered to eat the Lord's supper. First, when they gathered together they were divided into factions. They were divided over loyalties to certain leaders as Paul had written in chapter 1 verses 10-12

#### 1 Corinthians 1:10-12

<sup>10</sup>I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same judgment.

<sup>11</sup>For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers. <sup>12</sup>What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ."

**(English Standard Version)**

Think about the atmosphere of such a gathering. Where would you sit? What could you talk about? What messages would you be picking up from body language? How could you possibly concentrate on the teaching of God's Word or the observance of the Lord's supper in such a charged atmosphere?

The second issue for which Paul rebuked the church was their calloused insensitivity to one another. This congregation included rich and poor, slaves and freemen. Being a potluck, the rich brought food and drink, but the poor brought little or none. Those who had food and drink started eating and drinking even before some of the poor arrived (11:33) because they were hungry and frankly didn't care that their brothers and sisters had nothing to eat. Again, think about the impact such self-centered behavior would have both on individuals and on the personality of the church. It is amazing to me that this church even survived. This situation was serious and destructive as Paul emphasized in the final verse of this paragraph:

### 1 Corinthians 11:22

<sup>22</sup>What! Do you not have houses 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 commend you in this? No, I will not.

**(English Standard Version)**

### **The Lord's Supper: a time to remember the Lord.**

#### 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

<sup>23</sup>For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, <sup>24</sup>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.**" <sup>25</sup>In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. **Do this**, as often as you drink it, **in remembrance of me.**" <sup>26</sup>For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

**(English Standard Version)**

Verse 23 begins with the word "for". This is one of the keys to understanding this entire passage of 1 Corinthians 11:17-34. Beginning in verse 23, Paul was giving the reason why he could not commend them for their conduct at the Lord's Supper. Their conduct at the Lord's supper violated the purpose of the Lord's supper. The purpose of the Lord's supper was clearly defined by Jesus and Paul had been faithful to teach the Corinthians the meaning of the Lord's supper, but they had come to violate the event. Notice the phrase that is twice repeated in this paragraph: **Do this in remembrance of me.**

The purpose of gathering and eating the bread and drinking the wine together at a common meal called the Lord's supper was to intentionally remember what Jesus had done for them through His death, burial and resurrection.

They were violating this event by eating the bread and drinking the wine as if it was a common, everyday meal for the purpose of satisfying their physical hunger.

Like using your toothbrush to clean the toilet or using your birthday as an occasion to make sales pitches to your guests, the Corinthian Christians were violating the purpose of the event and in so doing were also despising and humiliating certain members of their church family. Little wonder that the Apostle Paul was upset with them.

### **The Lord's Supper: a time for introspection, repentance and change.**

#### 1 Corinthians 11:27-32

<sup>27</sup>Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an **unworthy manner** will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. <sup>28</sup>Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. <sup>29</sup>For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. <sup>30</sup>That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. <sup>31</sup>But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. <sup>32</sup>But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

#### **(English Standard Version)**

The warning in verse 27 is towards those who treat the Lord's supper as a common, everyday meal. That is what Paul meant when he described eating in an unworthy manner. It means to eat the bread and drink the wine in an unbecoming manner as a common meal and not as the occasion to remember and reflect upon the Lord Jesus.

The solution was for each of them to examine themselves as to their understanding and attitude towards the Lord's supper, to change their picture of the Lord's supper and to eat the bread and drink the wine in honor of the Lord Jesus. Because they had failed to discern between the Lord's supper and a common everyday meal, they had come under God's discipline for profaning the body and blood of the Lord Jesus. This discipline included weakness, illness and death. All the more reason for them to take responsibility for themselves, get their thinking right about the Lord's supper and straighten up!

### **The Lord's Supper: a time to honor and care for one another.**

#### 1 Corinthians 11:33-34

<sup>33</sup>So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another—<sup>34</sup>if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for judgment. About the other things I will give directions when I come.

#### **(English Standard Version)**

These final verses contain practical instructions for the Corinthians to change their behavior. If they thought they would get hungry and be tempted to eat before others had arrived or be tempted to eat without sharing with those in need, they were to eat at home. And when they did come together, they were to wait for one another and so honor and respect each other in the church family.

### **Conclusion**

As we think about the circumstances in the Corinthian church, we can very easily see

the impact of self centered living on the social environment of the church. Rather than being focused on Christ Jesus, they were focused on certain teachers and therefore divided amongst themselves.

Rather than being focused on Christ Jesus during the Lord's supper, they were focused on their stomachs and taste buds and in so doing were despising and humiliating members of their own church family.

The application is contained in this passage. However, because we do not celebrate the Lord's supper as a common meal, it's a little harder for us to eat before everyone has arrived or to get drunk on a teaspoon of grape juice.

But we can learn the lesson that we are to honor one another within the church family regardless of status.

And we must embrace the purpose for which we receive the bit of bread and the cup of juice – to remember the death of our Lord Jesus until He comes. If that is not what we are doing as we receive the bread and cup, then we are eating and drinking in an unworthy manner.

What we want to be thinking about during this time is summarized by the Apostle Paul later in this same letter.

### **1 Corinthians 15:2-6**

<sup>3</sup>For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup>that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup>and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. <sup>6</sup>Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.

**(English Standard Version)**

And why did Jesus suffer all of this? That you and I might be reconciled to God and experience God's life in us now and for all eternity in heaven. The alternative is to continue our lives separated from God now and for all eternity in hell.

God loves you and invites you to receive His gift of life through faith in Jesus Christ.