



1 Corinthians 11:29 The Lord's Supper "A failure of Body Discernment"

Facing the requirement for cleansing from sin at the table:

When we consider 1 Corinthians 11 it becomes obvious that Paul had two primary intentions in writing on the Lord's Supper as he does.

Intention One: Describe a Jesus and Body honoring manner for gathering.

Intention Two: Expose a Jesus and Body dishonoring issue in their gathering.

In this brief study we will look at both, but our primary focus will be on Paul's main emphasis - "Don't dishonor Jesus and His Body in the way you eat."

"1 Cor.11:29 For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, ***not discerning the Lord's body.***"

What is the nature of the problem in the Lord's Supper in Corinth?

It comes down to this: Whatever the Lord's Supper is and isn't it is apparently an expression of the Church that, more than almost any other thing the Church does, speaks of their understanding of themselves as the Body of Christ.

To fail to comprehend who we are as His Body is to cause us to defile this Supper. To fail to comprehend who we are as His Body, and to defile this Supper, is such a serious thing that Jesus is literally killing some believer's there because of it. If this doesn't frame a legitimate concern, one would wonder what would.

So what does it mean to "Discern the Lord's body?"

Look back in Chapter 10:

1 Cor. 10:16 The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? ***17 For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.***

As a gathering of many we become one in Him. I must function in awareness and love for the many, not in awareness and love for only myself. I must see myself connected with you, never independent from you.

All too often Church has tended to be a ritualistic environment, where such ordinances as the Lord's supper are done more as an expression between the Lord and the individual

believer, than something done as an expression of the unity we all share in Christ. While there is undoubtedly an important personal expression of love and appreciation for the work of Christ for the individual believer, however this expression is to be done, it must not be at any sacrifice or any ignoring of the corporate body element involved in this ceremony. The failure to “discern the Body” in the context of this meal is very serious. We are not islands unto ourselves. We are an organic family, with the blood of Jesus flowing through our family veins. We are one loaf of bread, much more than we are broken fragments. We must gather like it, because it is an expression of the eating of the one Bread - the Lord Jesus Christ, as Jesus described in John 6.

1 Cor. 10:21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord’s table and of the table of demons. 22 Or **do we provoke the Lord to jealousy?** Are we stronger than He? 23 All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful; all things are lawful for me, but not all things edify. 24 Let no one seek his own, but each one the other’s well-being.

If we eat the Lord’s Supper in a way that does not properly account for the Lord’s Body, we provoke Him. Pretty strong language. Once again, while our gatherings definitely edify the individual believer, this is never at the sacrifice of honoring the body principles. To whatever degree we fail to see the incredible unity we have in Christ to that degree we dishonor Him.

It is important to pause here and reflect on what we are seeing. Number one, everything we are and everything we do, as the body of Christ, is to reflect our absolute surrender and devotion to Jesus. Our gatherings are to be done in the context of conscious acknowledgment of His presence. Therefore, to do this at the expense of His body (the gathered believers) is to violate the Lord Himself. Because this is so important Jesus will discipline His Church, lest they continue in error and fail to comprehend and experience His intent for their gathering. His intent is obviously that they draw near to Him. This is endangered and violated when we dishonor His body.

1 Cor. 10:31 Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, **do all to the glory of God.**

Whatever we do as a body must be preeminently focused on the goal of bringing glory to Jesus. What the Church lost sight of, shortly after the death of the apostles, was the true nature of her existence. We don’t exist simply to avoid going to hell. We don’t exist primarily to treat Jesus as they He were our personal Genie in a bottle, and rub Him through prayer until we get what we want. We don’t exist to build monuments to our ambitions and personal achievements. We don’t exist to prove how witty, how powerful, how charismatic, and how creative we can be. We exist, and find our highest purpose and meaning in glorifying Jesus. Church is all about Jesus. If anything detracts from this, then no matter what else we may do, and connect His name to it, it dishonors Him, and it will hinder us from knowing who we really are in connection with Him in one another.

1 Cor. 11:27 Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be **guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.** 28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

When we fail to honor Christ and His body, we in a very real sense freshly crucify Him. What could be more serious? Do you feel the power and probing of these words? It’s not just “wrong” we are looking at. It’s certainly not just a matter of our “preferences” for the

way we gather. We mess this up and we are guilty of crucifying Jesus afresh. Absolutely nothing else in the New Testament attaches this much seriousness to it. Hurt The Body and you hurt His body. You might just as well see a hand full of nails in your one hand and a mallet in the other, ready to nail Him to the tree.

Therefore, we examine ourselves. We stop in our tracks, let our spirits touch the Spirit of Jesus, and ask Him this probing question - "Lord, is there ANYTHING I'm doing or thinking that is dishonoring or hurting this local expression of the Body of Christ that I'm gathering with? We take a moment to think over each individual we are gathering with, and consider these issues. We learn to look at them, as they really are "In Jesus," and as such we understand that to hurt them is to hurt Jesus.

1 Cor. 12:12 For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. 13 For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. 14 For in fact **the body is not one member but many.**

The body is made up of the many, not focused on just one person. This is a great word for Leaders. We must not function, in any of our functions, as though it was "all about myself," but always honor the many. This is a great word for the body. We must never function as though our goal was to exert our will over the others but to discern His will for each.

It's not to be about "my agenda," "my will," at the expense of Jesus agenda and will. We are organically connected. Just as I wouldn't purposely step on my toe, because it would cause the rest of me pain, so I don't do anything to the body of Christ that would cause it pain, unless that inflicting of pain is directly commissioned by Jesus Himself.

For centuries, leaders within the body of Christ have treated the body as though they were "little Jesus", "little heads," when in reality there is only One Head - the Lord Himself. We who lead have given ourselves titles of honor, titles and positions of power, and have directed, managed, facilitated, and controlled the body, all the while telling ourselves we were doing for Jesus and the body of Christ. We have defined our roles as though we were in fact "little heads." There is only one head, and many members. However leadership is to function, it is to be clear that it has nothing to do with anything that looks "headship / ruling" in nature. Leaders do not carry one single function that a head normally carries in a physical body. Leaders don't give instructions, based on their own will or ideas. They are not the brains of the body, the will of the body, the directors of the body. Leaders function as complete equals with the body, just as a hand has no greater rights of control than a foot or an ear. To miss this principle is to dishonor the body of Christ, to dishonor Jesus Himself, and to be guilty of crucifying Him afresh. Pretty strong language.

Eph. 1: 22 And He put all things under His feet, and **gave Him to be head over all things to the church, 23 which is His body**, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

If Corinthians looks horizontally at the body, Ephesians looks vertically. We as a body, will never function well horizontally until we see clearly vertically. We are "His" body, "His" Church. However we gather we want to connect to His fullness and not do things that diminish His headship and His fullness.

God the Father gave full headship rights to Jesus. No one else in the body of Christ approaches to this function, office, title, or role, in any manner. Anything that even remotely appears to do so is in direct violation of this verse. Does authority therefore not

exist in the members of the body of Christ? It does, but it is never authority based on a role, title, position, or office. It is authority “only” as it expresses the clear Word of Jesus to His body, only as it honors His headship and will, only as it listens to Him and conveys His contemporary will. In this sense people carry authority only as they express Jesus. This could happen through the newest believer or the oldest.

Eph. 4: 15but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into ***Him who is the head—Christ— 16from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.***

All our functions must continually be so in awareness of our connectedness with Him, lest we function independently and therefore inappropriately. To love Him and to love one another is to constantly monitor this connection.

Our relevance to the body is only so as we are a reflection of His nature, mind, and will. Our highest goal is to be so united with Him, that when we speak or act we do so in the direct awareness of being a reflection of Jesus.

Eph. 5:23For the husband is head of the wife, as also ***Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body.***

For leaders to function as “heads,” is tantamount to expressing the belief that they also saved the body. If such a notion would be blasphemy, then any form of leadership that claims any aspect of headship must be drawing dangerously close to such blasphemy, no matter how well intentioned or unwitting that form may be. If Paul returns to any theme in his writings over and over it is this one theme. All of the apostles lived with this sense of direct responsibility to Jesus, and awareness of his headship. No where, in any of their writings, do we see them functioning in ways that even remotely appears to be an independent expression of their will for the body. Absolutely all of their communications to the body represented a direct awareness of being nothing more than stewards of the mysteries and Word of God. Their power lay in their reflection of Him, and never was based in their roles as apostles.

Col. 1:18And ***He is the head of the body, the church,*** who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, ***that in all things He may have the preeminence.***

Do you see it? Could it be any clearer? He alone has the preeminence. The selfish desire I carry, that can so easily seek to control the direction of the body when it gathers must be submitted to Jesus’ will in and through His body. When I gather I gather to listen to and sense His will for my being an expression of His love and will as relates to the other believers. I don’t come together attempting to get my way, exert my will, demand my rights. I come to serve, to live for, to lay down my life for the Jesus that is living in each member of His body. This gives me purpose. It defines who I am. I am to be Jesus to you when we gather. I am to be a living incarnation of His will and love. I am to be completely dead to myself, and live only to reveal Jesus. Oh that God would reveal this to our spirits, and redefine our times together. Any deviation of this, and God knows there will be deviations, must be met with repentance, humility, and seeking the forgiveness of those offended. We will not do this perfectly. It requires we be far more dead than we are, but if we don’t acknowledge this as the pattern and definitively and deliberately move towards this then we, in failing to do so, indirectly express our disdain and lack of understanding for the magnitude of Jesus’ work at the cross and His present will in our midst.

Col. 2:19 and ***not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God.***

The great danger is that we would not “hold fast” to the Head. As strange a metaphor as this is, it aptly describes much of the last 1850 years of Church history. If we would grow we must “hold fast.” In nature it is impossible to imagine the necessity of a person reaching both hands towards his head and holding on tightly, lest it disconnect from the body, but when it comes to the body of Christ in its connectedness with Christ this is exactly the issue. We must deliberately reach upwards, see ourselves grasping, with intensity, the Lord Jesus, because we fear that at any moment His headship will slip away from us, and we will function as the proverbial with its head cut off, running about madly and blindly banging into everything. While such a picture is somewhat humorous the seriousness of this issue cancels all such humor. To sever the head from the body is to cause the body to instantly die. It doesn’t just weaken it, disorient it, or confuse it. It kills it. If Jesus is not our functional head, we are dead while we yet live. What could be more serious? What defines the Church of history more than this failure? Oh the grief this must cause the Lord. Why are miracles as lacking, and the power of Jesus so lacking in evidence? Could this be a part of the answer? Could this be the full explanation? Ponder this....

Therefore, if any of our activities in our gathering fail the test of connected awareness with one another and connected awareness with Him then we fail the body principle, we do not discern His body. If we act independently from one another and from Him then we fail to discern to the body. Whether it is gluttony at the table, drunkenness at the table, selfishness at the table, or absolutely anything that communicates “I want my way, I care primarily for myself, I value my will, over wanting His way, loving Him and His body, and valuing His will in every detail of how we gather.

Leadership must never act independently of the body, whose job is exclusively to represent the Head, not their own will. The body must never act independently from one another, whose job is exclusively to represent the will of the Head, not their own will.

It is all to be about and unto Jesus, not me, not you, and not anyone else. Our accountability to one another flows out of our accountability to Him.

I don’t own the Church, you don’t own the Church. It isn’t my Church, as a leader, it isn’t your Church in the sense of you being able to decide what all of us will do, we must discern His will and each other’s needs and minister accordingly.

When we do, then we will partake of His fulness, and Church will be a wonderful place. When we don’t we will become sick, weak, and will even approach death, certainly spiritually if not even physically.

It is at the Lord’s Table that these thoughts must permeate all we do, and remind us what we are all about. Jesus allowed His body to be broken and His blood to be poured out so that this could happen. Will we value, honor, and jealously guard this?