

# The Church and the Lord's Supper

In our last introduction of the church in Alpha we have established that unlike the concept of temples in other religions, the church is not a building no matter how beautiful, splendid or inspiring it is.

Instead the church is the people of God called out from the world to be His chosen race , chosen by grace not by merit, we are His royal priesthood because through Christ we have access and intimacy with the King of Kings.

We are a holy nation, set apart from the rest of the people of our nation living according to the Word of God dedicated to holy living to please Him and finally we are His special possession, irreplaceably valuable to God because we are a people for whom He sent His Son Jesus to bleed and die on the cross

In the light of this, how are we to practically live and function in this world? For this we will turn to our main passage in the book of Ephesians but this time looking at Ephesians 4:1-17 as well as Paul's first letter to the Corinthians in chapter 12 to get some idea of the way we live as a church and finally we will look at 1 Cor 11 to explore the meaning of the Lord's Supper as the other ordinance which vitally reflects the reality of our identity and function as a church

Let's firstly look at how we are to live as His church

## **A. We are to maintain the unity of the Spirit**

*Ephesians 4:1-3*

*I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, 2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, 3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*

You see, the church is no ordinary body like the Tropicana club or the Rotary club. It is the nucleus of a new kind of mankind, the part of the human race that has broken the curse of sin which has drawn a straight line across the whole of humanity fracturing us along the fault lines of race, ethnicity, beliefs , political parties, culture and even through families and right down the middle of even marriages. One source claims that 14,500 wars have taken place between 3500 BC and the late 20th century. No matter how many peace treaties we sign or how many times we reconcile we remain essentially the same.

One of the most powerful effects of the cross of Jesus Christ is the breakdown these barriers and created a new humanity. Look at what Paul writes earlier

*Ephesians 2:15-16 .. that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, 16 and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.*

*The church is described by John in Revelations 14 :4b These have been redeemed from mankind as firstfruits for God and the Lamb*

The word first fruits describes the church, the nucleus of a new humanity where the old barriers that divide us have been torn down. There is a new unity forged by the Holy Spirit we don't create it

*3 eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace*

In the light of this wonderful development naturally first thing the church would need to do is to live and interact in a manner that is worthy of this new Spirit created humanity Which is why Paul strongly urges them to do

*I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, **urge** you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called*

The way we now live in the church must reflect this new reality. We have a unity forged by the Holy Spirit, paid for by the death of Christ

That is why are asked to maintain the unity not create the unity  
The way we do this is by

Humility, gentleness and forbearance in love.

The rest of the world continues in strife and division but the church..the Ek-Klessia the called out ones we are called to live in a completely opposite way

Christ's death on the cross does not remove the temptation to sin from us

We are still like porcupines in church with the prickly quills of sin tend stabbing each other wherever which way we turn. Sometimes in church we tend to hide our sin better while we are in church but if we spend any time together underneath of thin veneer of civility sin still resides. The difference between club members and church members is how we deal with the sin.

The cross redeem us from the slavery of sin, we now have a choice to break free from the barriers that divide us.

We can make the choice to show our soft underbelly and not the sharp edges of our sin like these two porcupines. It is a new orientation.

When we come together we do so in humility , gentleness , patience bearing each other in love.

The first characteristic is humility and this is the total opposite of sin which turns us inward and our default orientation is to think more highly of ourselves than we actually are. The famous Christian author CS Lewis writes

*"Humility is not thinking less of your self ,its thinking of yourself less"*

*CS Lewis*

This is the total opposite of the root of sin which is pride because the serpent said to Eve Genesis 3: 5 For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." This resulted in Eve deciding for her self " that the tree was to be desired to make one wise"

Our spiritual transformation reorientates us, moves us from the number one spot in our lives where only our decisions and ideas matter to the original pre-sin era where only what God thinks matters. Our focus becomes loving Him and our neighbour so we empty our selves and when we come together as a church this enables us to act as one single body because everyone is focussed on how our behaviour affects others rather than how their behaviour affects us

If we are humble we will be meek or gentle. Gentleness and meekness is not weakness. The Greek word for this is “Prautes” and the illustration is that of a wild powerful horse but tamed and all that power is still present within the horse but he is gentle and obedient to his master. On a slow canter he prances at a steady pace, on the vital cavalry charge he is explosive in his power as he gallops but always under the command of his master.

When Jesus was arrested his apostle Peter immediately leaps to his defence and slashes off the ear of the servant of the Chief priest. Jesus immediately rebukes Peter

*Matt 26: 52 Then Jesus said to him, “Put your sword back into its place. For all who take the sword will perish by the sword. 53 Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father, and he will at once send me more than twelve legions of angels? 54 But how then should the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must be so?*

Jesus meekness and gentleness is on display, he could have easily unleashed 12 legions of angels to wipe out the arresting party. He had the authority and power but chose not to exercise it because he wanted to fulfill His mission to go on the road that lead to the cross. We on the other hand are too eager to unleash our power to protect our self esteem. When someone insults us (as they will inevitably do so in church remember we are all porcupines )we instinctively respond like Peter , we strike back and cut off an ear and we loose sight of the mission. Meekness is choosing not to retaliate even though we have the ability to do so. Then we will say we cannot take it so if this church is so full of people who will insult us if we don't retaliate we will leave.

However we are to respond in humility , meekness and patience ,bearing one another in love. This means that we are going to have a large blanket called love and we are going to throw it over the person who sins against us and we are going to wait for God to act and minister to that person. The church is made of hundreds of sinners each on a different stage of their walk with God. Each with a different degree of spiritual maturity just as we too are in this journey.

Now you ask me how are we ever going to be able to do this? We look to the cross

It is at the foot of the cross where we see where we are humbled because our sins are so bad that it took the Son of God to die for me and yet at the foot of the cross we are so precious because the Son of God was willing to die for us.

Then we turn our eyes and we see others in the same way we see ourselves and realise they were in the same wretched boat as us and they are just as precious as we are because because God was willing to die for them.

The extent to which we are able to grow and flourish in our local church will depend in large part on our own spiritual transformation. The way we treat others will not only be evidence of the extent to which the Spirit has changed us but also be the manner in which the Spirit

matures us. How are we going to express patience and forbearance unless there is some other church member who insults us or gossips about us or lets us down. It is only in church that enables this process to occur to mature us.

There are a lot of folk who spend only a little time in church because their understanding of church is the place for a good sermon and as soon as the service is over they shoot off. There is no opportunity to interact and encounter problems and learn to overcome these problems by the power of the Spirit. The church is a body of people it is not an institution. It is a dynamic growing entity where all the saints interact, rub each other the wrong way and learn humility, meekness patience and forbearance.

### **B. We are to focus on what we have in common**

*Ephesians 4: 4 There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism, 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

Notice the repetition of the word “one” the unity of the church is based on the nature of God we worship. Notice too that the unity is based on the essentials of our faith, the one church, the one hope the one God. In essentials we are united but in all other things we have the latitude to allow diversity of views. We can sing different types of worship songs according to our culture but the words of the songs always point to the one God. We can have different programs, different ways in which we organise our church or do evangelism but the same purpose to share the gospel and to teach the Word.

So the driving force behind our unity is not only how we treat each other but what we focus on, the things that we have in common that hold us together.

Even politicians understand this and it not so long ago when our illustrious former prime minister Mahatir Mohamad said “Malaysians be they Malays, Chinese Indians or the natives of Sabah and Sarawak must banish from their minds the idea of racial dominance, This country must be shared and shared fair by all the races

### **C. We are to use our gifts**

If one were to look closely at the most widely used currency in the world which is the USD you will notice etched on the coins the Latin words “E pluribus unum” which means out of many one which is actually a Christian principle. The greatest strength comes from our diversity but more often than not diversity is seen as a threat and not a strength.

One of the biggest causes of strife in society is the different levels of gifted ness. Some gifts are considered of more value than others and in society the way we reward gifted ness further entrenches these stereo types

There was a famous story of the legendary car manufacturer Henry Ford who has a problem with a huge new generator at his River Rouge plant. His engineers could not solve the problem and finally Ford called in an engineer called Charlie Steinmetz. When he came he rejected all assistance and only asked for a notebook and pencil and a cot to sleep in and spent two days just listening to the generator and making calculations. Finally he climbed up the generator and made a chalk mark at the side of the generator and told his audience to remove the plate there and take out 16 windings of the field coil at that location and this sorted out the problem. Subsequently Ford received a bill for \$10,000 signed by Steinmetz for General Electric. Ford returned the bill acknowledging the good job done by Steinmetz but respectfully requesting an itemized statement. Steinmetz replied as follows: Making chalk mark on generator \$1. Knowing where to make mark \$9,999. Total due \$10,000 which in today's money would be equivalent to USD 200k

The moral of the story is some people and their skills are more valuable than others and the cause of pride and division which are the same problems that can plague a church

Paul writes however

*Ephesians 4:7 (ESV) But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. ...*

Grace is unmerited favor and a gift God gives us without us deserving it. If we got the gift for free how can we boast in it or regard it as the basis of how we are better than others?

Not only that, grace is given to each one which means and there is at least one gift to every single believer. He will give one person measure of one particular gift and he will give another person a larger measure or smaller measure, it is up to God, but whatever the point is we are each given at least one gift. Let's read on

*11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ,*

Here is a wide diversity of gifts each one different but each one has one purpose to equip the saints for the work of ministry .

The gifts are for function.

They are not the kinds of gifts that a husband gives his wife on her birthday to make her look good but they are the kind that enables the person to be useful. They are functional gifts

This is not the only passage of gifts in the New Testament as there are two lists of gifts in 1 Corinthians 12 as well as Romans 12:6-8, 1 Peter 4:11 as well as 1 Cor 7:7 which indicates to us that these gifts are not exhaustive as there are different gifts each time Paul writes. What is striking is the diversity of the gifts

In the 1 Cor 12 list of gifts Paul writes that verse 24b *"But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, 25 that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. 26 If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together."*

The diversity of gifts will result in a disparity where some will seem stronger with greater measure of gifts and others look weaker but the disparity is designed so that those with the stronger gifts and more prominent in the body are to pay attention to or give greater honour to those members with lesser gifts or honour .

The net result of this effort by the ones with the stronger gifts is that there will be equality in the body of Christ. Those with less prominence by virtue of their not so prominent gifts will receive more attention and honour by those with the stronger more prominent gifts so everyone in the body will look the same.

The issue is not the individual gifts themselves but the diversity pushes on part of the body to minister to and pay attention to another part of the body so that all parts of the body are considered important and indispensable.

1 Cor 12:26 If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

The body starts acting as the body where every part is important. If the toe aches with a severe bout of gout the whole person is sick you cant just say my toe is sick

#### **D. We are to build up the body to maturity**

Look at Ephesians 4: 11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, 12 to equip **the saints for the work of ministry**, for building up the body of Christ

The one goal of the gifts in the body is to equip the saints , that is us , everyone for the work of ministry. We have a purpose and function as a church to bring the good news to the world and it is not just the work of leaders and pastors it is the work of every single saint. The work of the leaders is to equip the saints for the work of the ministry not to do the ministry

Some of us think church is like a football game ..22 men on the field desperately in need of rest and 76,000 people in the stands desperately in need of exercise.

The final result of the growth of the church is that the body become the body of the head Jesus Christ.

*Ephesians 4: 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes*

The body needs to come under the complete control of the head and the goal we need to move towards is intimacy in the knowledge of Jesus so we can think like him and ministry like Him in the world instead of being distracted by false deception of Satan. Hence in every genuine church it is the proper preaching and teaching of the Word which must take center place

#### **E. We are to build up the body in truth and love**

Finally we are to build up the body in love

*Ephesians 4: 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.*

The metaphor used in the human body where growth and function is a coordinated global affair where every part need to be in working order. However the motivating factor behind the growth and function is love. We minister because we love each other and we love the lost. We stand for the truth but we speak the truth in love. We treat each other with humility , meekness , patience and forbearance because we love and we love because He first loved us

From beginning to end, the church is about love, we were conceived in love, created by the love of God and the only way the world gets to see the love of God today is by seeing how love has transformed the people of the church.

## Questions

1. What is the church?
2. How did Jesus create the church?
3. How does the cross make us all equal in the church and not allow our differences to divide us?
4. What are the roles of gifts in the church?
5. What are each of our individual roles in church?
6. What is the unique feature of our individual gifts in church compared to the normal notions of what a gift is?
7. How do we express or maintain the unity of the Spirit in the church?

# The Lord's Supper

The next part of this module is to explore the Lord's Supper which is the meal which the church takes together to memorialise the event which broke down the barriers of sin and created the church. For this we will take the understanding in the Lord's Supper from the New Testament, from the first letter of Paul to the Corinthian church.

This is the church which Paul himself have planted and we can read all about it in Acts chapter 18. Paul writes to the church, the year is about AD 55 and he addresses various problems in the church with disunity, members of the church partaking in food offered to idols. In this particular case, he addresses them on the Lord's Supper.

Paul writes,

1 Corinthians 11:17-22 (ESV) 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. 18 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, 19 for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. 20 When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. 21 For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. 22 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.

The great irony in this situation is that when the church of Corinth gathered to celebrate the Lord Supper instead of humility, gentleness and patience bearing with each other in love they acted in an unworthy manner the total opposite of what Paul wrote in Ephesians 4. They had divisions and factions. The divisions are because there are two kinds of classes of people, the richer people who would come earlier and they would partake of the food with gusto, taking up most of the food, so when the poorer people would arrive much later because they had to work in the fields, there wasn't very much to eat at all. So each one goes ahead with his own meal. They are not sharing the meal together; they are eating up all the food on their own. One goes hungry and the other one gets drunk. It is a sign of disunity and in this way they are despising the church of God and humiliating those who have nothing. Imagine coming to Lord's Supper and the folk who have come two hours ahead of you have eaten everything else and you have got nothing to eat, nothing to celebrate the Lord's Supper with and they have actually gorged themselves with so much that they are actually drunk. So this caused a lot of strife and disunity among the church and it is this background to this particular passage.

The Lord's Supper begins with the bread.

1 Corinthians 11:23-24 (ESV) 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, 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."

Originally, during the Lord's Supper, it is actually a part of a whole meal and bread have to be broken and what Jesus did was, he took the bread and that bread symbolized his own body.



After giving thanks he broke it and this is symbol that his body is broken. His body is sacrificed, broken on the cross as payment for our sin. So when we partake of this bread, we are actually partaking in saying to ourselves and saying to God and saying to our neighbor next to us that this is the body of Christ. This is the death of Christ and I accept his death for payment for me for the penalty of my sin, for our sin and because we break this together, we symbolize the unity of the church, the creation of the church by a new humanity brought together by the gift of Jesus Christ sacrifice for us.

The next part of the meal is the cup, which is the cup of wine or grape juice. Paul writes,

1 Corinthians 11:25 (ESV) 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."

Here again is the cup. The cup actually symbolizes the blood of Christ, which is the sacrifice of Christ upon the cross and when you partake of this cup, which means when you drink the wine, you are actually appropriating the benefits of Christ's death on the cross when he shed his blood for us in payment of our sin. This cup is also described as a symbol of the new covenant. The old covenant is the one where God gives the people of Israel the Ten Commandments and they are supposed to obey it, but they actually failed many times to obey the law and so therefore with the New Covenant which is a new promise, is a promise which is actually secured to us by the death of Jesus Christ on the cross, whereby God will put his Holy Spirit into our hearts and the Holy Spirit will guide us and move us, so that we would obey the law of God in our hearts. So this cup represents Christ death on the cross, which inaugurates this New Covenant. In the old days when they had a covenant, they would actually take the blood of animals and splash it on the altar, in the same way is a sacrifice of the animals. In this case, this New Covenant or new deal is actually confirmed by the partaking of the wine in the cup, which symbolizes Jesus death.

The Lord's Supper is celebrated as a memorial, remembering the time of his death, because that is the pivotal event that has won us salvation and this has given us hope. Therefore, the Lord's supper also looks forward. The Lord Supper is a proclamation,

1 Corinthians 11:26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

The Lord's Supper taken as a body together is a proclamation or declaration of our confidence and of our hope that Christ will come back again one day and one day we will be celebrating the Lord's Supper in heaven with Christ together. So therefore as we take it, we declare our faith in this coming event. We declare our hope.

Finally, the Lord's Supper is a very serious event. So therefore we need to approach it in a certain manner and if we look at the Corinthian church, Paul writes,

1 Corinthians 11:27-32 (ESV) Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. 28 Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For anyone

who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. 30 That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. 31 But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. 32 But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

Here you have a situation where as Christians we are taking the Lord's Supper we need to examine ourselves, to make sure that we do not take of it in an unworthy manner, otherwise the consequences are just as the Corinthian church there will be judgment and the judgment may involve people falling sick or even dying as in that time.

What does Paul mean by taking of the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner? What must we do when we examine ourselves and basically this goes back to the context of the meal.

The context in the passage was a great division within the church. They were each going ahead with their own meals, eating and drinking and not caring about each other. So in a way what they were doing that they were despising the church by humiliating those who didn't have very much to eat. So therefore when we come together in a worthy manner, we need to understand that we are coming together, the Lord's Supper is not done alone.

You don't sit in your own house and have the Lord's Supper alone, because the meal together celebrates solidarity as a body of Christ together. So therefore when we actually sit together in Lord's Supper in the presence of disunity, fights and factions in the way these Corinthians had, it actually destroys the meaning of the Lord's Supper. The Lord's Supper was supposed to bring people together but ironically became the reason people were split apart again

The supper is supposed to represent that spiritual reality. So therefore when we take of it in the spirit of disunity and hatred with each other, we actually destroy the meaning of the meal.

Hence this is what Paul writes to them,

1 Corinthians 11:33-34 (ESV) 33 So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another— 34 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.

So therefore when we take of the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner in unity together as a church to memorialize the fact that he has died for us on the cross and with his death on this cross, he releases the Holy Spirit to dwell in our hearts and He binds all together. We celebrate our solidarity, our unity because of this one event. That is how we partake of the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner.

So let's end the presentation with some practical questions.

Who can take the Lord's Supper?

Anyone for which Lord's Supper is a spiritual reality. Anyone who can say when I take this bread and I take this wine, I actually accept Jesus death on the cross for myself. He is my Lord and he is my savior. There are some churches where only the baptize can take it, those who have church membership. Well, these are unnecessary restrictions, we don't see any of those

restrictions in scripture at all. So anyone who is a believer can take it. Children, well they may not have come to situation where they actually understand it, so perhaps it would be better for children to not take the Lord's Supper.

How often do you take the Lord's Supper?

You can take it as often as you like. There are churches who take it once a month, some take it once a week.

What about the elements of the Lord's Supper?

It is basically bread and wine and bread and grape juice, because these elements are actually symbols. It doesn't actually have to be a wine; it could be a juice. It actually doesn't have to be unleavened bread, which is the traditional bread which they use to use because the antecedent to the Lord's Supper is actually the Passover meal where leavened or the yeast is a sign or sin. so therefore the people of Israel when they left Egypt, took unleavened bread, so therefore our supper is actually the Passover meal. So therefore to be as historically accurate as ever some churches will take unleavened bread, but since this is just symbols we can be very particular about symbols or not. Important thing is that, for a Baptist church when we take bread and wine, they are symbols. They are symbols of the Lord's body and Lord's blood. In other churches like catholic churches, they actually have a doctrine called transubstantiation where they actually believe when the priest holds the cup up and he breaks the bread, that the bread magically becomes the actual physical body of Christ. We don't actually believe that because it is very clear in scripture where Jesus says, take this bread in remembrance of me. He doesn't tell you that this has turned into his literal body. Taking Lord Supper doesn't confer healing or extra benefits in terms of blessing to people as if it is a magical meal, these are not the reasons we take the Lord's Supper.

## Questions

1. Why do we take the Lord's Supper?
2. What does the bread symbolize? What does the wine symbolize?
3. Why is the blood or the wine the symbol of a new covenant? What is this new covenant?
4. When we take the Lords Supper we are to examine ourselves, what are we examining ourselves for?
5. What does it mean to take the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner?
6. Should we take the Lord's Supper at home alone? Why not?
7. Is the bread and wine the actual body and blood of Jesus?

8. Does the taking the Lord's Supper confer to us healing and blessing or result in more of our prayers being

answered?

9. If you have been sinful during the week and let the Lord down can you take the Lord's Supper? Is your

qualification to taking the Lord's supper based on your performance or His?

10. Do you have to be baptized to take the Lord's Supper? Why do some church's insist that you do? What is the

problem if you insist on this and exclude unbaptized but saved people from the Lord's Supper