

## **COSTLY COMMUNION**

**Scripture Reading:** Read 1 Corinthians 11

We've all heard of individuals who have faced life-and-death situations. Law enforcement and our military, for example, often find themselves in such settings. What may surprise you, however, is to learn that receiving the Lord's Supper at a church service could be such an occasion for us. Take a look at what Paul says in today's chapter reading: *"Therefore, 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...For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep [i.e. have died!]"*

It's obvious from these verses that Paul wanted the church (and us) to take seriously the Communion celebration; something the Corinthians had failed to do. Earlier in the chapter, Paul had chided the church for its ungodly practices at the love feast that preceded Communion. Everyone who was able to, brought something to share (similar to our modern-day pot luck dinners). Sadly, at Corinth, the wealthier attendees made sure they got their share first. They gorged themselves and, also, ended up getting drunk while the poor were left with scraps and felt humiliated. In this state, drunken believers and the humiliated poor, gathered together after the meal to supposedly celebrate the death and resurrection of our Lord as one body. What a mockery of what Communion was intended to convey to the church! By eating and drinking in such an unworthy manner, the wealthy believers at Corinth failed to honor the Lord's costly sacrifice at the cross. They treated it with contempt by getting drunk beforehand. There was no sacred consecration in light of Christ's death. Communion seemed to have been more of an afterthought to these drunken believers. In addition, they failed to discern the true nature of the church as Christ's body. The poor were disrespected, division was rampant and folks thought only of themselves.

The end result? The church literally ate and drank themselves to death as they came under God's judgment. This judgment may have come directly (as it did with Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5). It's also possible that it came indirectly in that the grace of God and the benefits of the atonement that could have been received by faith as the believers received Communion were blocked. Instead of receiving healing, strength and grace in their time of need, they received nothing and their illnesses continued to ravage their bodies until they died. Such judgment, however, was not intended to destroy them but to call them to repentance. *"When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world."* The costly Communion was intended to get their attention and to challenge them to change their ways. That's why Paul challenges us to examine ourselves before we receive the bread and cup (11:28).

**Action Step & Prayer Focus:** The next time you receive Communion, pray for the Lord to search your heart so that you take seriously the sacrifice of Christ's literal body and that you honor his spiritual body, the church, by living in right relationship with other believers.

**Take-a-way:** *Communion is costly when we dishonor Christ's body.*