

## **“Remember Jesus”**

### **1 Corinthians 11:23-26**

#### **Introduction**

1. **On September 20, 2011 CBS television premiered the crime/mystery show “Unforgettable.”** It is the story of a Syracuse, NY, detective with a rare mental condition called *hyperthymesia*. “Thymesia” is the Greek word for memory; “hyper” is the Greek word for “over; beyond; exceeding”—put them together and it describes a super memory. There are about 20 documented cases of hyperthymesia in the United States—people who remember pretty much everything that has happened in their lives. Give the person any date and she will tell you what day of the week it was, describe the weather and tell you what she had for lunch.  
**Most of us can’t remember what we had for dinner last Tuesday.** We can’t much remember anything about last Tuesday. Our memories are amazingly empty.
  
2. **It is amazing how easily we can forget some of life’s most important experiences and people.** My mother once flew to Cairo to meet my father who had been on a long tour of Africa. She got off the plane, ran and threw her arms around . . . the wrong man.  
 We forget the name of a favorite school teacher. We can’t remember the first time we ate ice cream. Don’t ask what year we took that vacation to Yellowstone Park or Disneyworld.  
 I was going through some college files and came across a paper I wrote for a class on social statistics research. The good news was that I received an “A” for the assignment; the bad news was that I don’t remember writing the paper and couldn’t understand many of the technical terms I wrote.
  
3. **That’s why some of Jesus’ last words were, “Remember me!”** As if we could forget!! How could anyone forget Jesus? Who can forget the Son of God who loves us? Who can forget that Jesus died for us on the cross? Who can forget his miracles and teachings? The answer is a resounding “we can forget.” Unless we are reminded we can forget just about anything.
  
4. **Some recent research on human memory says that our memories are like computer files.** We click “save” and forget about them unless we reopen and reread the file. The researchers say that we don’t actually remember the original memory but that we remember the last time we opened and reviewed the file. In other words, the more often we remember, the better we remember.
  
5. **St. Paul writes about remembering in his first letter to the Christians in the city of Corinth.**  
**1 Corinthians 11:23-26**  
*For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, 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.” In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in*

*remembrance of me.” For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.*

6. **These are words of action from Jesus and for Christians.** There are many different names used to describe this act of remembering.  
“The Lord’s Supper” because of the first time the disciples ate the bread of remembrance and drank the cup of remembrance at the Last Supper on the eve of Jesus’ crucifixion.  
“The Eucharist” which means “thanksgiving” from 1 Corinthians 11:24 about “when he had given thanks.” This is about our giving thanks for Jesus.  
“Communion” from the Greek word *Koinonia* which means “sharing in common” because Christians remember Jesus with the bread and cup in community.
7. **Some refer to Jesus’ call to remember as an “ordinance” because it is ordered (commanded) by Jesus.** Others refer to a “sacrament”—defined as a “visible sign of an inward grace”—that eating the bread and drinking the cup is an actual means of getting the grace of God into us.
8. **Some claim that the bread and wine are miraculously transformed into the real body and blood of Jesus.** Some say that Jesus is supernaturally in, under and around the bread and wine. Others think that Jesus is specially spiritually present. And, others teach that nothing supernatural happens but that is mostly a memorial to help us remember.
9. **Depending on which church and tradition are rules about who may serve communion—an ordained priest or an ordained minister or any Christian.**
  - Some are quite strict about the “words of institution”—that specific words must be spoken by the pastor for communion to be valid.
  - Many traditions insist that a Christian must be baptized and confirmed before receiving communion.
  - Some close communion to everyone who is not a member of their church or denomination; others open communion to everyone who believes in Jesus.
  - Some churches have communion every day, some every week, some once a month, some quarterly and some once in a while.
  - Some use unleavened bread because that was the practice at the Jewish Passover; some use ordinary common bread.
  - Some use wine with alcohol; some use grape juice that is non-alcoholic; some give a choice.
  - And, more recently there are churches that provide gluten free bread to help those with gluten intolerance.
10. **While many of these traditions are old and strong, most of them are not Bible-based.**  
The Bible says nothing about who can serve communion, about which words to speak, about a link between baptism and communion, about confirmation, about the chemistry of the bread or what is in the cup or about membership in any particular church. What does the Bible say about frequency of communion? Nothing.  
So, we may love certain traditions but we must be careful when insisting that our way is the

right way if the Bible doesn't support our views.

## 11. So, let's take a look at what the Bible does say.

### Who to remember: Jesus

1. **First of all and most of all, Christian Communion is about Jesus.** The starting point is not us but is Jesus Christ.

2. **Paul wrote** *“For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed...”* (1 Corinthians 11:23). These words take us back to the eve of Jesus' crucifixion. But, before we go there we should understand the order of the writing of the New Testament. If we read through the New Testament we usually start with Matthew and then read Mark, Luke and John. By then we have read a lot about the Last Supper and what happened that night. By the time we come to 1 Corinthians 11 it is very familiar information. What we may not know is that Paul wrote 1 Corinthians *before* Matthew, Mark, Luke and John wrote their Gospels. So, 1 Corinthians 11 is the first mention of communion in the Bible.

**Paul was telling his readers what they had already heard verbally many times before. He was writing down the communion practiced by believers in young churches across the Roman Empire.** The Gospel writers filled in the details later on. Let's read the report from Mark 14.

#### **Mark 14:12-26**

*On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus' disciples asked him, “Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?”*

*So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, “Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. Say to the owner of the house he enters, ‘The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ He will show you a large upper room, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.”*

*The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.*

*When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, “I tell you the truth, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me.”*

*They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, “Surely not I?”*

*“It is one of the Twelve,” he replied, “one who dips bread into the bowl with me. The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.”*

*While they were eating, Jesus took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take it; this is my body.”*

*Then he took the cup, gave thanks and offered it to them, and they all drank from it.*

*“This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,” he said to them. “I tell you the truth, I will not drink again of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it anew in the kingdom of God.”*

*When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.*

3. **Those disciples at that Last Supper could not have fully understood or appreciated what Jesus was talking about or what they were experiencing.** They didn't need to remember Jesus—he was right there in front of them. It must not have made sense for him to say “this is my body” when they could see his body and “this is my blood” when all his blood was still flowing inside of him. They did not yet realize that Jesus would be crucified and die the next day. It would all make sense later.
4. **It made full sense to Jesus.** He was giving himself for them. His body was for them. His blood was for them. He was going to die for them. And, he didn't want them to ever forget.
5. **Several years ago I was visiting in the South Island of New Zealand and talking with a man in his office.** The topic was generosity and how Christians give to help the poor and needy. I told him that it was like giving blood. I said that we don't give all our blood at one time but spread it out so we have more to give another time. Then he told me his story.  
He said he had only given blood once and it was a terrifying experience. He sat down in a chair, the nurse put a needle in his arm and the container started to slowly fill with his blood. She was called out of the room and he was there alone as more and more blood was drained out. He had never done this before but it seemed like she was gone a very long time and he was losing an awful lot of blood.  
When she returned he said she screamed, “No. No. That's too much. No. No.” and ran to pull the needle out of his arm. He never gave again.  
**The true story is that Jesus was nailed to a cross and gave until he died.** It would be the equivalent of a living man donating his vital organs for us to have transplants and live. He gave his body and blood for us.  
*“This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,”* Jesus said. He bled and died so we could live in an eternal covenant relationship with God.
6. **Don't forget. Remember. Remember. Remember Jesus!**

## **How to remember: Communion**

1. **How do we remember? Communion.**
2. **Ceremonies and symbols are powerful tools for remembering.**
  - The year after my mother died our family gathered around the table with a birthday cake on her July 6<sup>th</sup> birthday and sang “Happy Birthday.” We didn't forget.
  - Charleen and I were married on June 18<sup>th</sup> and I have worn a wedding ring ever since. The ring doesn't make me married but it reminds me every day that I am married and it signals to friends and strangers alike that I am married.
  - On September 11, 2011, our nation paused to remember what happened in New York, Pennsylvania and Washington ten years earlier. We cannot forget.
3. **Sadly, it is possible to mess up the best of remembrances.** You can start a marriage fight and ruin a wedding anniversary. You can change Christmas from Jesus to shopping. You can make Easter a vacation in Florida rather than the resurrection of Jesus. You can take something intended for wonderful good and turn it into something totally wrong.  
**That's what the 1<sup>st</sup> Century Christians were doing in Corinth.** They had a church dinner

before Communion and the rich people came early, ate up all the good food and got drunk before the poor Christians showed up. They treated each other badly and then pretended to be so pious when eating the bread and drinking the cup. They forgot about Jesus when they came to communion. **So, Paul tried to set them straight.**

**1 Corinthians 11:27-30**

*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. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. 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.*

- 4. Because of these lines there have been Christians who refused to join in communion.** They are keenly aware of their sinfulness and don't want to make matters worse by taking communion when they know they are not worthy.  
During a communion service at a Presbyterian church in the Scottish Highlands a young woman passed up communion because she felt so unworthy of Jesus. And then she began to cry. An old saint in the congregation came over to her and spoke in a loud whisper heard by others, "Take it lassie. Take it. It's meant for sinners." That's exactly right. Communion is for sinners. Jesus is for sinners. The Bible doesn't deny communion to people who are unworthy but to those who take communion "in an unworthy manner." Sinners are welcome but disrespect is not. Sinners are invited but carelessness is not. Sinners are expected but casual routine is not.
- 5. Communion is wonderful.** Communion is joyous. Communion is serious. Here we meet Jesus in a special and supernatural and intimate encounter. We come as sinners and drop our sins at the feet of our Savior.
- 6. At communion we remember Jesus.** But, we must first know him in order to remember him. That's why communion is for Christians. Christians are those who believe in Jesus as God and Savior and Lord. Christians are those who have accepted his life and blood and death in our behalf. Christians are those who have sworn allegiance to Jesus in life and death. Christians are those who love Jesus and don't ever want to forget.

## **Conclusion**

**Today when we come to communion we come to Jesus.** We come to the Eucharist to thank him. We eat the bread and drink the cup to remember him. It is not most about what we eat and drink it is most about Jesus and what he has done for us. Today, in communion . . . remember Jesus. Remember Jesus. Remember. Remember. Remember Jesus.

October 1-2, 2011 Wooddale Church

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