

Kirkwall Presbyterian Church
'Approach the Lord's Table with reverence and understanding'
1 Corinthians 11:17-32
October 18, 2026
By Keith Marcy

This is indeed a special day for Kirkwall. We have received five people into communicant membership – three by transfer and two by confession of faith. We thank the Lord for bringing them into our midst.

Today is also a celebration of the Lord's Supper. This is a remembrance service – remembering the death of our Lord Jesus in the way He instructed us to remember Him. He took two common elements served with the Passover Supper – unleavened bread and wine. If you can picture Jesus taking a piece of flat bread, which is stiff and hard, and breaking it in two, as He said, *"This is my body broken for you."* He did not mean His body became a piece of bread or that the bread became a piece of His flesh. Rather, He used the same figure of speech as when He said, *"I am the door..."* or *"I am the good shepherd."* He did not mean that He became a door literally. He meant He became like a door through which people would enter Heaven. He also meant that He was like a good shepherd who would give His life for the protection of His sheep, which, in Scripture, means His people – meaning those who believe in Him to take their sins away. So, in the Communion service we are to remember that His body was broken; it was spit upon, whipped, punched, slapped, mocked and finally crucified.

And when He held up His glass of after-dinner wine and said, *"This is the blood of the New Covenant,"* He did not mean we were to drink His blood. He meant His blood would be shed like wine being poured out so that He died. In this way He purchased, for all who believe, the forgiveness of sin.

Before we began this celebration of the Lord's Supper, Pat read from 1 Corinthians 11:17-22, 27-32. It was written by Paul to the church at Corinth, who had turned something reverent and spiritually meaningful into an excuse for an unmannerly party. We could compare it to a pot-luck supper. But not like we have at Kirkwall. The Corinthians behaved like

mannerless gluttons. They did not wait until all had assembled before they gave thanks and began to eat. Not at all! As soon as a few arrived, they began to gorge themselves on food and the wine. Some even got drunk. Those who arrived later got the scrapings; some got nothing. My mother would have said to us kids if we behaved like that, “*Shame on you!*” We would also have received a well-deserved slap on the backside. Paul is even harsher on these unmannerly and irreverent Corinthians. And rightly so. The Lord’s Table is always to be a revered table; based upon a holy remembrance of Jesus’ death. It must be a time when believers remember they are forgiven a multitude of sins because of Jesus’ death.

And so, Paul reminds them, “*For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord, eats and drinks judgement on himself [herself]. That is why many of you are weak and sick and a number of you have died!*”

Died??

This is more than a spanking! This is coming under the wrath of God! Because these Corinthians have participated in a holy ordinance without recognizing the seriousness of Jesus’ sacrifice for sin.

How can we avoid falling into this behavior which is so disgusting to Almighty God?

Paul says, “*Stop and examine yourselves!*”

In other words, ask yourself some questions like these:

1. Do I realize that my sins have built a wall between me and God?
2. God allows no sin into Heaven, because Heaven is only for people who have been washed clean in the blood of the Lord.
3. Do I recognize that Jesus is the only person who never sinned?
4. Therefore, He is the only one whose blood could atone – or cover over – or forgive the sins of another.
5. Only He is the way to Heaven. Only He willingly went to the cross! Only Jesus can save a person.

6. Therefore, we worship only Jesus; we thank only Him; we remember only Him as we reverently eat and drink the symbols of the Lord's Supper. The bread and wine remind us of His sacrifice for we who are unworthy recipients of forgiveness. But, in remembering our unworthiness, we also remember that He alone is worthy of our devotion, our thanks, our reverence – our coming before Him in a worthy manner, which is telling Him that we appreciate what He has done for us!

Doing this involves a degree of knowledge, a degree of spiritual maturity. For this reason, I am uncomfortable to invite children to the Table of the Lord. When is a person ready? We cannot name an age. A person is ready when, from their hearts, with understanding they say, *“O Lord my God, what have I ever done, that you would suffer to redeem me?”*

May we be so kind as to teach the Gospel before we offer anyone the Table.

Amen and Amen!