

1Corinthians 11:17-27 "Are You Approved of God?"

1 Corinthians 11:17-26 ¹⁷ But in giving this instruction, I do not praise you, because you come together not for the better but for the worse. ¹⁸ For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you; and in part I believe it. ¹⁹ For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you. ²⁰ Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper, ²¹ for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk. ²² What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you. ²³ For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which 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." ²⁵ In the same way *He took* the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me." ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

Paul's letter to the Corinthians is one which is designed to get the attention of these believers and exhort them to seek and to love God above all, and their neighbor as themselves. And in the process of doing this Paul mentions specific examples of how they have fallen short, and what they need to do to correct the problems.

He would love to be able to praise them and use them as model Christians for the world, but that doesn't seem to be where they are right now. In trying to give them a glimmer of hope he does praise them for the way in which they remembered him and the teachings he brought them.

1CO 11:2 "I praise you for remembering me in everything and for holding to the teachings, just as I passed them on to you."

But remembering and doing are meant to work together. And some of these people were not doers of the word and had deceived themselves into thinking that simply belonging to the

church or simply professing faith in Christ was enough to demonstrate that they were the real thing, when in fact, as James points out, "faith without works is dead."

And the kind of works Paul is looking for among these people in Corinth are the kind of works which are demonstrated in love for one another, and not the divisions which were being caused because of selfish motives.

The Thessalonians, on the other hand, were believers who did not just talk about their faith, but showed their faith, and Paul recognizes this in their lives as they submit to the Spirit.

1TH 1:3 "We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ."

Paul would love to be able to write the same message to the Corinthians, but that was not to be.

1CO 11:17 "In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good."

Imagine being on the receiving end of this personal letter from an apostle of Jesus Christ. And, as Paul begins this section on the type of worship that was going on in Corinth, he points out that in the following directives there is no praise, only correction.

This is not to suggest that Paul has given up on these Corinthians, only that he loves them enough not to sugar coat their problem. He gives them the truth in love. And that is how the word of God must be taught. And that is how Paul disciple's other leaders, including Timothy.

2TI 3:16-17 "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

This Corinthian church was not equipped for every good work; not because they had not heard the truth, but because they were not willing to walk in that truth. And when we're not willing to walk in the truth of God's word then the Lord will get our attention by pointing us back to His word and exhorting us to get back to the basics of our faith.

This is what is happening here in our text. Look at what Paul says at the end of verse 17; "for your meetings do more harm than good."

What meetings are being spoken of here by Paul? The inference here is those times in which they come together as the church in Corinth, where they meet together, specifically as the body of Christ.

Now, consider what this means. Paul is saying that under the present circumstances when they come together as the church in Corinth, they are actually doing more harm than good. In other words, they would be better off if they didn't get together at all as a church if they were going to persist in division.

But in what ways are they doing more harm than good? Well, when they come together, they actually harm each other's faith because they are not coming together to encourage each other; they come together for selfish reasons. The writer of Hebrews tells us one of the main reasons for coming together as the church.

HEB 10:23-24 "Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds."

The operative phrase here is "one another." If we come to church only to get, or only to be entertained, or only to make ourselves feel good for having come, then it makes it quite difficult to have the attitude of reaching out to others for their good, and to encourage them toward love and good deeds.

This is a major reason for meeting with the saints; to strengthen each other to be better equipped for the work that Christ has given us. And Paul is saying to these Corinthians that under the circumstances they'd be better off not meeting together if they have no intention of meeting to encourage one another.

Now, is Paul seriously saying that if the circumstances are not perfect, and if the attitudes of everyone's heart is not perfect that it would be better not gathering as the church? No. What he's suggesting here is that since they are doing more harm than good when they get together, they need to actively seek how they might now do good as opposed to harming each other. Paul is

exhorting them to change their attitudes as they humble themselves before the Lord.

This is meant to shame them into reality in the sense that, under the present circumstances, they are not found worthy to be given the privilege to represent Christ as the church in Corinth. And Paul is saying that that needs to change for the sake of Christ.

The following directive or the following instruction Paul is about to give is an apostolic order, if you will, coming directly from the throne of God as Jesus Christ Himself, gives them this directive from the hand of His servant, Paul.

1CO 11:18-19 "In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. 19 No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval."

Again, notice that Paul makes the distinction between them practicing their faith privately, outside of public gatherings as the church, with gatherings where they come together as the church representing Christ. This doesn't mean they are any less the church when they don't meet publicly, it simply means that Paul is exposing how they are presently acting publicly, under circumstances which need to change.

But he points out where their problems surface. It all stems from the divisions they have among each other. And here Paul is about to make a difference in the kinds of divisions which are unhealthy, as well as the divisions which are actually healthy for the church.

He begins in verse 18 with the unhealthy divisions. He uses the Greek word *schisma* which is where we get our English word schism, meaning a division or dissension. We saw some hints to these issues early on in this letter that might have led to the type of divisions Paul is addressing here in this section.

1CO 1:11-13 "My brothers, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. 12 What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ." 13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul?"

The divisions Paul speaks of in chapter 11 are a bit different from the ones he mentions in chapter 1, which he believed on the basis of credible witnesses. But in chapter 11 he makes the comment, "and to some extent I believe it", as it regards this next allegation.

There may have been rumors and other allegations he may have heard second hand from other sources, but under the circumstances, he believes some of what he has heard, based on their track record of divisions in other areas.

These divisions may have involved false teachings that included patterns of behavior which were harmful to the church, but were being promoted among some of the people in this church. But then he addresses those in the church who have divided themselves out from such practices and teachings when he says in verse 19, "No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval."

The NASB and the NKJV puts it this way in the beginning of verse 19, "For there must also be factions among you..."

What does Paul mean by this?

The word factions in the Greek is, *hairesis*, and it's where we get our English word heresies. What Paul is alluding to here is more than the quarrels that he addressed in the very beginning of this letter. Heresy was no small thing as it pertained to the advancement of the health of the body of Christ and it is always placed within the context of false teachers advancing the kind of teaching that is detrimental to the church. The apostle Peter addressed this in his second letter.

2 Peter 2:1-4 ^{NAU} But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be ***false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies***, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. ² Many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned; ³ and in *their* greed they will exploit you with false words; their judgment from long ago is not idle, and their destruction is not asleep. ⁴ For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment;

Peter uses the same Greek word, *hairesis*, and qualifies it by using the word destructive. And so, when Paul introduces the idea that there are heresies among those in the church at Corinth, he is making it clear that those who advance these false teachings are proving themselves not to be advancing a genuine faith.

1 Corinthians 11:19 ¹⁹ For there must also be factions among you, so that those who are approved may become evident among you.

Paul is drawing a line here between those who are approved and those who are not. The word approved can also be translated, tested, with the idea that the test determines where you come out as it relates to being approved, or as the ESV translations puts it, genuine.

^{ESV} **1 Corinthians 11:19** for there must be factions among you in order that *those who are genuine among you may be recognized.*

Though it may seem strange, Paul is recognizing a reality that has existed in the church from the very beginning and that is there will always be tares among the wheat. In the parable of the tares and the wheat Jesus makes clear who the tares are.

Matthew 13:37-38 ³⁷ And He said, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man, ³⁸ and the field is the world; and *as for* the good seed, these are the sons of the kingdom; and the tares are the sons of the evil *one*;

What Paul seems to be advancing here, in this portion of 1 Corinthians 11, is that part of the reason for quarrels and strife among the church in Corinth may be connected to people whose hearts are full of strife because their hearts are indicative of sons of the evil one; that is, they are unbelievers mixed among those who have been approved or found genuine.

A little later in this letter this will result in Paul's condemnation of drinking the cup of the Lord's supper in an unworthy manner that we will address next week. But, it is in this context of advancing heresies that prove how some in the church are making it evident that their behavior and their teachings will not be overlooked as they are exposed, especially as it applies to taking the Lord's supper in a public church fellowship context.

1 Corinthians 11:20-22 ²⁰ Therefore when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper, ²¹ for in your eating each one takes his own supper first; and one is hungry and another is drunk. ²² What! Do you not have houses in which to eat and drink? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? In this I will not praise you.

In light of those who are found to be genuine, or approved, in the body of Christ in Corinth, Paul then moves to behavior that is inconsistent with that which is according to truth. And you'll note that it involves the sensual part of man, those things that include eating and drinking that, in this particular case, leads to debauchery.

And so, what some in Corinth thought to be an act of worship, turned out to be more of a revelry that excluded true worship in spirit and in truth. These actions would have involved everyone in the church who participated in these gatherings, both believers and unbelievers. And again, it's important to see how false teachings can lead to destructive behavior among those who are genuine in the faith.

Paul is saying that what they thought to be a "church" meeting that involved eating the Lord's supper was anything but true worship of the risen Christ. Instead, it degenerated into a gathering that excluded some people from the fellowship as they expected to share in a communal meal but found that the food was gone by the time they got there, while others had been there for some time drinking their way through the meal, thus some were drunk.

Paul was not rebuking them for eating and drinking before gathering as the church, but was rebuking them for gathering as the church under the auspices of the celebrating the Lord's supper that was to be held in high respect without any of the trappings of sinful behavior. As a result, Paul accuses them of despising or having contempt for the church of God as they humiliate those who have nothing.

Here, the church is seen as those individuals who make up this particular fellowship who are, in a sense, ostracized from the body as they are deemed as those who have nothing, which may

give the sense that they did not have extra to bring to the table of food and fellowship, now being shamed or humiliated in the process, thus making them feel like second-class citizens in the Kingdom of God. For this Paul will not praise them.

And so, as we move forward it is important to put all of this into the context of where Paul is going with this letter as he introduces what seems to be the “formula” for celebrating the Lord’s supper properly. Now, granted, if you’ve been part of a church for any length of time and have celebrated the Lord’s supper with that local body, chances are pretty good that the Pastor has used this section of 1Corinthians 11 as the template, formula if you will, for taking of the Lord’s supper. I know that I have.

But that is not what Paul is primarily doing in this section. Instead, he is juxtaposing sinful, contentious behavior that appears to have as its underpinning’s heretical teachings that lead to schisms, that lead to drunkenness and gluttony, in what would otherwise be called the gathering of the church for the sake of worshipping and honoring Christ.

And so, what we will find as we move forward, especially as it relates to taking the supper in an “unworthy manner,” is that this will have more to do with their reason for gathering rather than introducing them to the proper formula for celebrating the Lord’s supper.

Paul says, when you come to meet together it is not to eat the Lord’s supper. So, in response to this attitude Paul reminds the church why they should gather together. And the way that he does this is to take them back in time when the risen Lord appeared to Paul and personally gave him instructions, and the history that surrounds those instructions, of what the Lord came into this world to accomplish for his people.

1 Corinthians 11:23-26 ²³ For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which 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." ²⁵ In the same way *He took* the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me." ²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

A couple of things should be noted here. This is not the first time that Paul has referenced the Lord's supper in light of sinful behavior, that places heretical teaching into the context. In fact, it could be argued that this is still in the same context of what we find in chapter 10.

1 Corinthians 10:13-21 ¹³ No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it. ¹⁴ Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. ¹⁵ I speak as to wise men; you judge what I say. ¹⁶ Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a sharing in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a sharing in the body of Christ? ¹⁷ Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all partake of the one bread. ¹⁸ Look at the nation Israel; are not those who eat the sacrifices sharers in the altar? ¹⁹ What do I mean then? That a thing sacrificed to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? ²⁰ *No*, but *I say* that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God; and I do not want you to become sharers in demons. ²¹ You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.

Could it be that part of what Paul is referencing in 1 Corinthians 11:19, as it pertains to the factions or heretics in the first part of that verse, is a direct throwback to sharing in the cup of demons as individuals in that church use their liberty to partake of a communal meal that would necessarily imply the sacrificing of that animal to false gods?

Is Paul placing the Lord's supper in juxtaposition to the supper that some were partaking in, that involved idol worship? This would seem to be the case in its context. And so, if one could take a lax attitude toward eating meat sacrificed to idols, is it possible that this same attitude is introduced within the body as it pertained to church gatherings where communal meals and strong drink are part of the equation, as the Lord is thus taken out of the equation?

In light of all that is taking place in the church at Corinth, Paul essentially throws on the brakes and takes them to God's very word on the matter of why it was that Christ died for many. And

he begins by reminding them that he personally received this from the Lord.

Now, it would have been common knowledge that the words Paul shared with the Corinthians were words that were first uttered by Jesus Christ at the Passover meal that he shared with his disciples. One would think that there would be no reason for him to invoke a special utterance given to him by the Lord himself as it relates to the Lord's supper.

But in doing this Paul introduces a personal note from Jesus as if to say, I did not receive this message second hand, but was given it directly by the Lord, and now 'I am presenting him as the Lamb of God who takes the sin of his people, so as to remind you that the Lamb of God is not presently properly represented in your assembly. Pay attention!'

It is in this context that Paul adds that this meal took place on the very night in which he was betrayed. For all intents and purposes this is precisely what is taking place in Corinth as the church gathers, not to partake of the Lord's supper, (though some may have thought they were), but to gather for "fellowship" around a table of food and drink for the stomach, not for the soul. In this way they have betrayed the intent of the gathering as the body of Christ.

By the way, the reason that the church is identified as the body of Christ is because of the literal body of Christ that was broken that secured the eternal life of God's people.

Romans 7:4 ⁴ Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God.

It is this very issue that Paul wrote about to the church in Ephesus, with a similar message of considering the body of Christ, as that fellowship of believers are encouraged to grow up so as not to be "carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming;" something that was already happening in Corinth by the time Paul wrote his first letter to them.

Ephesians 4:11-16 ¹¹ And He gave some *as* apostles, and some *as* prophets, and some *as* evangelists, and some *as* pastors and teachers, ¹² for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, ***to the building up of the body of Christ;*** ¹³ ***until we all attain to the unity of the faith,*** and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. ¹⁴ As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; ¹⁵ but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.

Christ was betrayed once, he should not be betrayed again at the hands of those whose bellies, not their hearts, are the leading indicator of their “faith” that should be attached to the one who gave his life as a ransom for many.

And so, this Lord’s supper “formula” has nothing to do with introducing them, or reintroducing them, to the proper procedure for celebrating this meal, rather this is a down and dirty history lesson for these people who are bound to repeat the history of this betrayal. Paul will have none of that.

1 Corinthians 11:24-25 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." ²⁵ In the same way *He took* the cup also after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me." This Passover meal was only some twenty years in the rear-view mirror at this point in history as Paul writes this letter, and in such a short time they have taken the bread and the wine that represents the covenant of our Lord’s body and blood being broken for his people, and have turned it into an excuse to gather for themselves, not Christ.

Because of Paul’s love for these people, he will not sugar coat their carnality and their acceptance of false teachings/teachers in the Corinthian church who are likely promoting the kind of teachings, (heresies), that tempt the sheep of Christ’s pasture to be carried away by the deceitful scheming of these interlopers.

This was the same message that Peter introduced in his second letter.

2 Peter 2:1 ^{NAU} But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves.

Paul will not hold back the truth as it pertains to the reason for the church in Corinth's existence and their high calling to gather in the name of Christ. Either way, both groups, wheat and tares, are about to get a wake-up call that has and will continue to have some devastating effects on that local group of people gathering as the "church of Jesus Christ."

But before Paul goes there in verses 27-34, (that we'll get into next week), Paul continues to remind these people of the love of Christ and what that love cost him as his body was broken and his blood was spilled. He makes it a point to repeat those words of Jesus himself: "do this in remembrance of Me."

There appeared to be no meaningful remembrance in this gathering of people whose stomachs are the object of worship instead of the one who gave his life as a ransom for many. But then Paul again introduces that personal aspect of Christ's involvement in his church, what the apostle John in the book of Revelation describes as the "the One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands..." (**Revelation 2:1**)

The one who walks among the seven golden lampstands is the same one who will come again, according to Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:26 "you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes."

Whether they realized it or not, if they were participating in the elements that spoke to the body and blood of Christ, they were proclaiming his death until he comes, which is to say, they may have been making such a public proclamation while denying this most glorious truth with their actions. Again, we will take a deep dive into this aspect of Paul's teaching next week.

When Paul says, “until He comes”, he is reminding them that he is in fact coming again, and the question they need to ask themselves, are they ready to receive him in light of their present reality, with the understanding that he is not coming as a meek and mild Lamb, but as the Lion from the tribe of Judah who will devour his enemies?

Jesus is aware of every member of his body and we are held to a higher calling than those who come along for the ride who will finally hear from Christ, “depart from me you who practice lawlessness, I never knew you.”

You and I who are in Christ have been baptized into his death and resurrection and the life we live in the power of His Spirit to his glory.

May we remember all that Christ accomplished on the cross for us and may we be thankful.

Colossians 3:12-17 ¹² So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; ¹³ bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. ¹⁴ Beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity. ¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ Whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.