



gracefellowship

Series: Crossroads: Between Kingdom and Culture
Title: Worship Concerns Pt 2

Date: June 2, 2024
Passage: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

Today we are looking at the second half of chapter 11 where Paul is addressing some issues in the church at Corinth that are causing problems for the people and have been the cause of divisions in the church. Paul has already dealt with another issue that caused division in the church in the very first chapter when he addressed the fact that people were divided over who their favorite leader or pastor was. Some of the people followed Paul, others followed Apollos and still others followed Peter. Then you had the super spiritual people who said they only followed Jesus! In this chapter we face another set of issues that were dividing people and causing problems in the worship gatherings.

Last week we talked about the issue of women coming to worship and either being immodest for their culture or displaying open rebellion against their husband's leadership. Today we are dealing with an issue of an abuse of the Lord's Supper, which really demonstrated a divide between the "haves" and the "have nots" in the church.

Before we read the passage again let me try to give some context to what Paul is addressing. The early church would gather primarily in homes for their worship times. But they also got together for larger gatherings. A central piece of worship was the taking of the Lord's Supper and when the whole congregation gathered they had what was known as "love feasts"- kind of like a potluck meal. Because Jesus often ate with His disciples and shared meals with people, it was a natural thing for the disciples of Jesus to gather together around meals.

The problem is that the cultural practice was that wealthier people were served more food while "lower class" people were served less food. The practice carried over into the gatherings of the Christians and Paul is grieved by it. The rich brought more food and the poor brought less, but rather than putting it all together to share, they kept it divided and had the rich eating in one area and the poor eating in another.

A second view on this was that the wealthy were able to arrive early and get a start on eating and drinking because they weren't as constrained by a work schedule as the poorer people in the church. So by the time the underprivileged arrived they food had already been eaten and the wine had already been drunk.

One way or another, their actions demonstrated selfishness, not love and it showed the gap between people in the church who were more wealthy and those who were more poor. Their disgraceful conduct at the common meal, or love feast, cast a dark shadow on their observance of the Lord's Supper.

With that as the backdrop for what Paul is writing, let's read the passage again together.

:: 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

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

18 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.

20 So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat,

21 for when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another gets drunk.

22 Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? Certainly not in this matter!

23 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night 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, 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."

26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

27 So then, 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.

28 Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup.

29 For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves.

30 That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.

31 But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment.

32 Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world.

33 So then, my brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat, you should all eat together.

34 Anyone who is hungry should eat something at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment.

And when I come I will give further directions.

We often think that no good can come at all from divisions in the church, but Paul says these things actually seek to show which of these groups has God's approval! When it comes to these issues there are some who are right and some who are wrong. Paul is able to look at the divisions here and point to what is right and what is wrong. Then he is able to correct this mistreatment of people that is taking place in the church.

Community and Unity go far beyond physical proximity.

The people had gatherings, but not community; they had proximity but not unity. Just because they were near to each other did not mean they saw one another as equals. The church had drifted a long way from where it started in Acts 2. Do you remember how things worked in the early days of the Church?

:: Acts 2:42-47

42 They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

43 Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.

44 All the believers were together and had everything in common.

45 They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.

46 Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts,

47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

This begs the question of us of how well we take care of one another in the church today. By and large, I think we do a pretty good job of helping one another meet needs, but I wonder sometimes if there is ignorance among the wealthier members of our church of the difficulty among the poorer members? Are we guilty of turning a blind eye to the needs of others in our faith family? We may be in the same room, but are in genuine fellowship and do we love one another enough to meet the needs of those in our body?

Here's how Paul encouraged Timothy to address those who are rich in this world:

1 Timothy 6:17-19

17 Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

18 Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.

19 In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

Disciples of Jesus take care of one another through generosity.

The two best ways I have seen this practiced in our church:

- General Budget giving that allows us to help people with benevolent needs. When you give to our church we are able to help people as needs arise.
- Life Groups supporting one another and coming together to bless people in their group during a time of need.

In Corinth the opposite was happening. The wealthy were feasting and the poor were going without. One of the crazy things about this is Middle Eastern culture is famously known for hospitality. In this series we have talked about ways the Church is called to be different from the culture and stand out from the culture, but this is one of those times the church should excel even above and beyond what the culture does when it comes to loving hospitality. Instead, the church in Corinth has a black eye in this regard.

Because the demonstration of this divide in Corinth came around the “love feasts” when the Church gathered together, Paul directs them to think about the Lord’s Supper and what Jesus did with His disciples and what that means for us.

:: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

23 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night 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, 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.”

26 For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

When Jesus tells us to remember Him by eating the bread and drinking the cup, he isn’t telling us to draw back to memory His death on the cross. He is instructing us to live out what He has done for us through His death and resurrection.

The Hebrew word for “remember” is “Zakar.” That is not a word that is about firing off parts of our brain to hold on to information. The word is attached to action. In the Old Testament we are told...

- God remembered Noah and his family and caused the winds to blow and the waters to recede on the face of the earth.
 - o God didn't forget Noah's family and the animals were floating around on the water! To remember meant to move with action to help.
- God remembered the people of Israel in slavery in Egypt.
 - o God hadn't forgotten about them being in Goshen under the oppressive hand of Pharaoh. To remember meant He moved to rescue them and bring them out of slavery.

“Biblical remembering is a body activity, not merely a head activity.”

- **Chad Bird**

When we remember the sacrifice of Jesus and what He gave up to bring us into His family it should cause us to act in a manner like Jesus, living in a sacrificial way. Paul even says when we eat the bread and drink the cup we proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. Remembering the death of Jesus moves us to action to proclaim His goodness and demonstrate to the world that our faith is active, not passive!

The gospel is meant to impact us in such a way that we want to share it with others. We are the people of God who proclaim the salvation of Christ until He returns.

Then Paul is going to conclude this section with a pretty scathing critique of what is happening in Corinth and he is going to give them some insight into God's response to their unloving practices.

:: 1 Corinthians 11:27-34

²⁷ So then, 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.

²⁸ Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup.

²⁹ For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves.

³⁰ That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.

³¹ But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment.

³² Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world.

³³ So then, my brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat, you should all eat together.

³⁴ Anyone who is hungry should eat something at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment.

And when I come I will give further directions.

When we come to the Lord's Table a few things should happen:

We should evaluate our heart before taking the Lord's Supper.

- Look inside and make sure you have confessed any sinful activity or ongoing sinful issues to God.
- Each time we take part in communion I would encourage you to take some time prior to coming to the table to search your heart and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal any areas of sin that have not been confessed before you come to the table. Then confess those things and know that God is true to His word and forgives us of our sins, casting them as far as the East is from the West.

Paul tells the people of Corinth something they didn't appear to be aware of: Because you are treating the Lord's Supper and the "love feasts" with contempt some of you are getting sick and have even fallen asleep (code for died!).

- This seems harsh, but look at the words he uses and how he describes God's response to our sin:
 - o When we are judged in this way by the Lord
 - o We are being disciplined
 - o So that we will not finally be condemned

There is a grace in God putting some people to sleep early so they don't continue in their sin, leading others astray and potentially causing a much harsher condemnation. I don't know if God still operates in this way today, so please don't jump to conclusions if someone gets sick and meets an untimely death that God was judging them for sinful behavior!

But it should serve as a warning for us that God takes this all seriously, therefore, we should as well!

Then Paul closes up the section by saying, "So then, my brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat, you should all eat together." This is another example of loving one another by looking past class or gender or social status in order to be united under the banner of Jesus.

One of our Elders recently bought me a something I'm going to hang in my new office. It says this:

"This is what God's Kingdom is like: a bunch of outcasts and oddballs gathered at a table, not because they are rich or worthy or good, but because they are hungry, because they said 'yes.' And there is always room for more."

This morning we are going to prepare to take communion together. Let's sing a song together and take a few moments to search our hearts before we come to the table.