

INTRODUCTION

TEXT: 1 Corinthians 11:18-22 and 26-34

18 For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, 19 for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. 20 When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper that you eat. 21 For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. 22 What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. 27 Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of profaning the body and blood of the Lord. 28 Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. 30 That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. 31 But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. 32 But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. 33 So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another- 34 if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home- so that when you come together it will not be for judgment. About the other things I will give directions when I come.

Main Point: Worship sincerely

Paul's intention is to correct the problem of insincere worship among the Corinthian church. He takes this very seriously. To understand this, we must take a moment and look at how the early church went about worshipping.

For centuries, the church has mostly gathered in buildings and worshiped with an orderly agenda that includes a combination of music, prayers, preaching, and the Lord's Supper. In the early church in the Roman Empire, there were few buildings to meet in for the church was against the law. So, they met mostly in homes. Therefore, their congregational meetings were smaller by necessity. Even so, very often the churches would meet in the largest places available to them. In Corinth, a wealthy city, the church had a combination of many poor people and some wealthy people.

The larger houses were owned by the wealthier people, so often it was their homes that became the meeting places for the church. When the church came together, it was customary to do several things. One was pray, another was to hear teaching and preaching, another was taking the Lord's Supper, and another was a love feast, or a shared meal. (Note, there is no command in the Bible regarding how often the Lord's Supper is to be celebrated, nor that meals have to be a necessary part of a worship gathering. These were the practices of the early church.)

The problem the Corinthian church was having in this particular case was that the love feast part of the gathering time began to dominate the worship. The feast caused problems on a number of levels. For example, some wanted to get to the feast first, and eat the good food before it was gone. Those who came later would often be left out of the feast. Furthermore, in the wealthier homes, it was customary to have a dining room that accommodated 10 or so people on couches. But then there was an outer dining area, without couches, where servants and the servant class could eat. It is supposed that part of what Paul is unhappy about is that there were those to whom food was hard to come by, and when they showed up at the gathering, they were not allowed a place in the formal dining room and there was little or no food for them at all.

So divisions were coming up among them. The rich and the poor, the fed and the hungry, as people raced to worship to compete for food. On top of that, some people were even getting drunk at the feast. They would get drunk and go right into the other portions of their worship, including the Lord's Supper portion. Therefore, what should have been a time of joy and worship was becoming a time of division, greed, cliques, self indulgence and hatred of the brethren. Paul was extremely unhappy about this situation.

Consequences of insincere worship

Insincere worship that included division in the church, hatred, jealousy, greed, and all the rest, is a very serious offense. Paul explains the gravity of this sinful practice by saying this:

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

Don't you realize, Paul is imploring that you are declaring the crucifixion of Jesus when you take the Lord's Supper? Until He returns, the gospel must be declared. The Lord's Supper does this in a physical way. The bread and wine remind us of the body and blood that were on the cross, dying for sin. Eating the bread and drinking the wine is the physical way of expressing that we receive Jesus' offering on our behalf. When we do this act, we are declaring the gospel in symbolic form. We must declare His death for sin until the day He returns. This is the center of the gospel and the center of our message and faith. And yet, you are drunk when you come to declare the gospel? You hate your brothers, the one's Jesus died for? You are shaming them by separating into cliques of the wealthy and the poor, the haves and have nots? You are letting some of your brothers go hungry? You are indulging your greed? Really? While you are worshiping and declaring the death of Jesus for sins? This is very serious. How serious?

So serious that Paul says this:

30 That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died (*lit. "fallen asleep"*).

“What does this mean?” you ask. It means that God is killing off the Corinthian Christians who refuse to take Him seriously. He is making some of them sick also. Now, this might be disturbing to you. What is not being said is that every time someone gets sick or dies it is because he is angering God. No, on the contrary. People get sick for all sorts of reasons. One man was even born blind not because of sin, but for the glory of God. But it is saying that if a Christian, who knows Jesus, begins to hurt the church enough, God at times will make him sick and even kill him off. Verse 32 makes it clear that this illness and death is a judgment from God for discipline, but not a loss of eternal salvation:

32 But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

There were Corinthians who God was killing off so that he could discipline them, even though they were saved. That’s discipline! If you’re dead, I guess you won’t make that mistake again! At this point, you might be wondering if God still does that today. May answer is, who can be sure, but I wouldn’t trifle with a warning that strong. In other words, it wouldn’t surprise me to know that God brings the wood to His sons and daughters who refuse to love and worship with sincerity. We serve a God who does not endure being mocked.

Solution for insincere worship:

Paul’s corrections to the Corinthians are pretty simple. They involve two things:

1. Examine yourself
2. Remember to love one another.

1. Examine yourself

28 Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. 30 That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. 31 But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. 32 But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

Verse 29 says that eating and drinking without discerning the body eats judgment. In other words, if you go through the motions of worship, you show up on time, and you mouth a few words and you sit through a sermon and you take communion when it is served, but you don’t realize that you are profaning Jesus Himself by self-indulgence and hating others, then your worship becomes illness and death that you are drinking in.

However, the way to fix this is to examine yourself. The Corinthian worshiper says Paul, was to stop and say, “Do I do that? Do I show up for the food? Do I look down on my brother? Do I only think of myself? Am I paying attention to the fact that I am profaning the cross itself?” He says, “Examine yourself.” This is excellent. He does not say, “Examine your neighbor” or “have your neighbor examine you.” He says, “Examine yourself.” You know, there is no better cop for yourself than yourself.

In other words, we always get in trouble when we want to justify ourselves and be cops for others, then when we are cops who police our own souls, thoughts, and lives. It’s easier and more fun to be cops of others isn’t it? I have some people in my life, I’m sure you do too; who’s every message to me is how I can do better, how I can improve. Sometimes, these people are very helpful to me. But sometimes I wonder, “Is this guy or gal benefiting from the same examination reserved for me?”

At times, I police my kids and other people too much. I watch them and see error and try to correct motives and intentions that I do not even understand. In fact, if there’s one thing I’m not an expert on it’s the motives and intentions of someone else’s heart. But often I want to be the police for those, to correct the people in my life for their selfish approach to life. But you know what? The one person whose intentions and motivations I know the most about is the one I should be examining: me. If I police myself, search my own heart, it’s then I can do some real good. That is what Paul is saying here. He is telling the Corinthian Christians, “Each of you, think about worship. Look inside. Get your mind and heart ready. Check your own motives. If your focus is wrong, change it to the body and blood of Jesus.”

And I say the same to you. Examine yourself. Every time you are gathering to worship with the other believers, whether here on Sunday’s or in smaller gatherings, examine your heart and put your focus back on the body and blood of Jesus. Remember each time the gospel that saves you from your sins. Remember that it is the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross that makes us one body with Him, that saves us, that makes us a family.

2. Remember to love one another

33 So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another- 34 if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home- so that when you come together it will not be for judgment.

Paul’s practical solution was “listen, when you have a meal, don’t start before the poor get there or before they can get their portion. And if you are so hungry that you feel you have to eat more than your share, eat at home. You are coming together to love and worship one another.”

It is a mocking of the blood and body of Christ to neglect your brother in the church. Make no mistake; the sin that was being committed by the Corinthians united the misuse of one another with the body of Christ. They were “*despising the church of God and humiliating those*

who had nothing.” This was the sin that made Paul’s blood boil and made God bring judgment on His own children. He looked at the worship of the Corinthians, who were remembering the sacrifice of His Son, done in love, to make them all one, and He sees them indulging themselves and hating the brethren.

The practice of Christianity, and therefore of worship itself, always comes back to the way you treat people. Every time we come together, we have this same two fold purpose – whether we meet in a home for a community group or in this building. We are meeting to love one another and worship God. Make no mistake: you cannot separate these two acts. You cannot worship God and hate your brother for whom He died. So the examination of the self must include a review in the heart of how you are treating other people.

How about you and me? I am examining my own heart and searching my own mind. Am I here to worship the Son who died? Am I discerning who He is? Secondly, is there anyone I do not love, am dividing against, and looking down on, competing with? I need to police this because it is important to God. When we gather, we worship. When we gather, we love one another. If we gather and we do not love one another, we do not worship. If we gather and do not worship, we are profaning Jesus.

How about you? Here’s my closing invitation to you: starting today, and all week, examine your heart. Is the focus of your time of worship to consider the body and blood of Christ, given for you, or is it something else? Secondly, is there someone I need to repair my heart towards so that I do not profane Jesus and insult Him? Then, I invite you to reach out and make things right. If there is someone you must reconcile with, or apologize to and ask for forgiveness, take that step during this week, or by the time next Sunday comes to an end. We want to worship our Lord from pure hearts.