

“UNITY”

- 1 Corinthians 11, *part 2* -

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1 Corinthians 11:17-34 *Now in giving these instructions I do not praise [you], since you come together not for the better but for the worse. 18 For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. 19 For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you. 20 Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. 21 For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of [others]; and one is hungry and another is drunk. 22 What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? 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 do not praise [you]. 23 For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the [same] night in which He was betrayed took bread; 24 and when He had given thanks, He broke [it] and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." 25 In the same manner [He] also [took] the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink [it], in remembrance of Me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. 27 Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks [this] cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. 28 But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. 30 For this reason many [are] weak and sick among you, and many sleep. 31 For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. 32 But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world. 33 Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. 34 But if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, lest you come together for judgment. And the rest I will set in order when I come.*

(11:17-19) Everything Paul had been attempting to impart to these believers in Corinth was to effect a loving unity within the church there. Clearly the complaining, the self-interest, the legalism, and the abusive use of grace were all causing division and of course perpetual unrest. James 3:16 says that *“For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.”* Thus it was all surely a recipe for eventual disaster in this fellowship unless something was done. In any such conflict environment, it is only a matter of time before that church splits up and ultimately ceases to exist. Therefore Paul was unable to praise them for where they stood. Their time together had not bonded them or united them together as it should have. In fact, it seems that their time together had only aggravated their existing issues! They clearly were feeding each other's sin tendencies and had perpetuated an atmosphere of “every-man-for-himself.”

There were some (as there are today) who were **and are** compelled out of self-interest to struggle and divide. Some people will never find submission to any authority other than their own, or they are willing right up until they are not. Paul knew their hearts. They had hearts of sinners, just like him, and just like us. Therefore he knew their tendencies and the division that had come as well as the greater division that would eventually come if nothing was done.

However, one good thing always comes out of such times. That would be that once God gets involved (and He always does), the “cream would rise to the top.” That means that those whom God did indeed choose for position, would be revealed...those who are really a part of the body would be made manifest and those who were not would move on. In times of trial, God separates the “sheep from the goats.” From time to time God “cleans house.” All those to which time has run out on God's grace and patience are swept out and the house is clean once again.

(11:20-21) The communion celebrations of the early Christians were at least embedded in, *if not wholly carried out in*, the form of an actual meal. These were often called *Agape Feasts*, although the exact terminology varied in the first few centuries along with other aspects of practice. However because of the language and their innate practice, these "agape feasts" were and are essentially referred to in English as "love-feasts".

Clearly what was transpiring there in Corinth was the gathering of the fellowship for a corporate meal, with each participant bringing a contribution to the meal according to their means. Perhaps predictably enough, it could at times deteriorate into merely an occasion for eating and drinking, or for grand displays by the wealthier members of the community.

But certainly "communion," the Lord's Supper, did not start out being practiced as it is today. It was more than the ceremony it has become that utilizes a bit of cracker and a sip of juice. It was essentially a community meal, much like the first one in that upper room with Christ Himself. It was their first century "potluck." However, when the church in Corinth got together for their potluck meals, it was just that. It was just a time to eat and nothing more. They failed to grasp the "Christ" of the moment, or the other-centered aspects of sharing more than food that was to be present in such gatherings. We often fail in the same manner when we get together. It is easy to fall into the trap of seeing such events as a time to catch up with your friends or hang out with your girlfriend, or fill your empty stomach. But such is God designed to engage, unify, share our lives and speak into each other's walk.

When we come together in this manner, whether it be for a meal or some other social or semi-social gathering because we are a church, Christ is present. He is the reason we are even together here as a family. He is the reason we are here today! He is the reason we live and breathe and have been freed from the power of sin. So whenever we come together, for whatever the assumed reason, Christ is to be the center. These people had forgotten that He is to be the focus of each and every one of our gatherings. The church there in Corinth had forgotten who their "head" was. They took each other, their church, and even Christ Himself for granted. It happens easily to all of us if we fail to be attentive.

(11:22) The "agape feasts" of Paul's day...that which was originally initiated by Christ Himself, were meant to be times of unity, communion, and remembrance between all the parts of the body of Christ with the "head" firmly in place. But again, they had forgotten where they had come from and the journey that had brought them there.

How easily we forget the past! We fail to remember what we once were and the life we left behind. Like the children of Israel after departing from Egypt, we are apt to only remember the "leeks and the onions;" the perceived "great things" we left behind. We often, in our tunnel vision, only see today, failing to remember what we were rescued from: the bondage, the despair, and the slavery to this world.

Many people have gotten on that "bus" to freedom. Then, as the weeks and months wore on, they began to forget and, yes perhaps inadvertently, to forget all that God as well as their brethren had done in their lives. We then "turn inward" and see everything only in the light of how it affects us personally. For this Paul says, "I cannot praise you."

(11:23-25) Paul goes on to explain how righteous communion ought to be conducted. He begins with a word of personal testimony; what he himself had "received from the Lord" and how he had delivered that same blessing to them. He had received the gospel, the new birth. He himself was a beneficiary of the flesh-and-blood sacrifice of Christ. He had experienced first-hand the things which he was sharing with them. He didn't just learn these things from a seminary or from a commentary. The best information is always that which is learned first-hand, and in that, Paul was the man...

All of this must be understood in light of the culture of the day. For it was well understood in that day that if a person ate with another person...sharing the common bowl of food, that each participant was “one” with each of the other participants. This is why an unredeemed Jew would never eat with a Gentile. Understanding this aspect gives clarity to what Christ was inferring and what we in the same way wish to confer.

The body of Christ has been broken for us. It was His broken body that *was* to be, and *is* to be literally consumed by us so that it is a very part of our being. But what does this mean? While indeed the meaning is somewhat symbolic, we will miss the impact of it altogether if we let it pass as mere hyper-spiritual analogy.

We are to **ingest** the life of Christ. He must become a very part of us; more than head knowledge or a churchy verbal affirmation. We must become a **very part** of **Him**. Quite simply, we are to be as Christ *was* and *is*. That’s what the communion of the body is all about. Not just *learning* about Him, but literally *making him a part of us*. Alone, and together as a church body, we are to consume and live out the Christ life.

(11:26) As we take part in a righteous communion...whether an “agape feast” or something more traditional, we consume, we become one with, the “flesh and blood,” the very life essence of Christ. In this act we proclaim the gospel with our lives. We practically manifest our unity as a body of believers with Christ as our head. We must know that nothing tears down the enemy as much as unity in the body of Christ. That is why Satan seeks to disrupt such unity. For in unity, we declare God’s glory, and we are truly unstoppable.

(11:27) As Paul said when he began discussing this issue, there will always be those among us who are not truly of us. Such a statement is not to make us unduly suspicious or paranoid of others around us. It is simply a reality within the realm of a local church. Real love...Christ love...will endure and never cease. If they can walk away from you, they never really loved you, despite any verbal affirmation to the contrary. Real love never ceases. That is how we know Jesus loves us!

Yet Paul is herein emphasizing the fact that some folks will “take of the life of Christ” in an unworthy manner. More than just falsely engaging in the practice of communion, people will come to church and even feign love and commitment for both Christ and others in the body. They will live among us for many reasons, some legitimate, and some not. But eventually...if they are not legitimately a part of the body, they will drift on and away...

John 6:64 “*But there are some of you who do not believe.’ For Jesus knew from the beginning who they were who did not believe, and who would betray Him.*”

With a mere cursory read through scripture one quickly gathers that God doesn’t take kindly to lying and false confession. Perhaps because the unity of the body is so crucial, and the price He paid for it was so great, that to disrespect Him in such a manner is a real slap in the face. Yet certainly many people have come, professed, participated, and ultimately departed. They partook of communion here...the traditional kind as well as the greater communion of His body, and then they walked away, often without so much as a word of thanks. They **lied**. 2 Peter 2:20-21 warns that having done so they go out to a life that will be worse than the one they left prior to joining with that church body. They walk away invariably to a life worse than they left behind the first time. So instead of being **cleansed** by His blood, they become **guilty of it**...

(11:28-30) Paul’s warning begs to be heard. For the decision to live for Christ is not one to be taken lightly. The commitment to enter into a covenant relationship with God as well as your brothers and sisters, is a serious matter; one on par to getting married. Thus your departure is the equivalent to a divorce and we know what God thinks of that! If we take of communion, we should be able to come before Him spiritually naked. There should be nothing hidden: souls bared before our Savior in truth, repentance, and humility. He was “broken” and we are to come before Him equally “broken.”

Such an examination is not mine to make for you. Each one of us must make that examination for ourselves before we take of the communion of the body of Christ. Because of man's tendency toward deceit and lies, we seek for those who would partake of this body to "covenant" with God and us, as God called upon his people to do numerous times throughout scripture.

Before we say yes to Christ, and join Him and a local body of believers, we need to understand just what Christianity entails. It is living out the life of Christ that we take inside of us. That life is not an easy one; the gospels give us an accurate rendering of the Christ life, and nowhere does it promise an easy street and a comfortable walk.

That is the life we embrace when we take of His flesh and blood. It is not a life of ease and painless euphoria. Rather it is a life of sacrifice, service, and commitment to Him, His body, His church. As much as we don't like to acknowledge passages such as verse 30, the text is certainly clear. The cost of a sloppy handling of what is in truth a divine union, is so often very costly. I'm sure each one of us can think of someone who has put their hand to the plow and then looked back. Give it some time and it never ends pretty, does it?

(11:31) Verses 30 and 31 do not mean we have to have achieved some sort of spiritual perfection before we can partake in communion. If that were the case, few of us would ever have the boldness to partake. It means we do not have knowing sin in our lives, and we do not have a false heart. Are we truly committed? Are we in this all the way, or do we have one foot in the door? What would it take to cause you to kick your brothers and sisters to the curb? It's a really strange thing to see folks think that such behavior is going to be ok with God!

We must "judge ourselves." We must use careful and honest introspection, and we must face the truth of where we stand today in Christ. We must do it honestly and regularly because the stakes are high! To lie to ourselves is to attempt to lie to God! To break covenant with God and his body is to break communion and communication with God himself. These are not my words...but rather *his*.

Ps 66:18 If I regard iniquity in my heart, The Lord will not hear.

Job 27:8 For what is the hope of the hypocrite, Though he may gain much, If God takes away his life?

Isa 1:15 When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood.

If we fail to judge ourselves, we will thus be judged from the outside. You will not be judged by those around us, but by God Himself. His patience with us is unparalleled on this earth, but He stays with us only when we ourselves are part of Him. Are we willing to bring our thoughts and actions into the light of day?

(11:32) When God is thereby forced to deal with us, we need to know even then His hand of correction comes out of His love toward us. Hebrews 12:6 says "*For whom the LORD loves He chastens...*"

We don't like to face verses like verse 32. This isn't the God we want. We want Him to be at our beck'n call, and yet we so often also do not want any accountability to or for Him...we want no authority over our lives. We want Him to look the other way, and the church too while we are at it.

(11:33-34) Paul ends with a return to his "other-centered" theme. The bottom line is that this is the dynamic that is to be found in the faithful body of Christ. It is this kind of love that is to be so prevalent and universal in His church. It is this love that is to be innately found in the act of communion, the fellowship of His saints. It will be a reality in any and every body of Christ that is doing dynamic things for king and kingdom!