



1 Cor. 11:17-22

“Just Because You’re in the Garage”

17 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.

The problems of the Corinthian church were obviously very serious, Paul had just finished addressing the scandal caused by the decision of a group of the women in the church to oppose the biblical pattern of headship and assert an unbiblical egalitarianism by removing the veils, or *peplum*, with which respectable Greek women covered their heads in public. Paul moves now from that contention to an even more serious one, the Corinthian's abuse of the Lord's Supper. And here he is going to discuss that situation in the gravest of terms, openly rebuking them.

Now, when a church of Jesus Christ comes together it should always produce good effects in its midst, that is after all the purpose even the necessity of our assemblies. Calvin put it this way: ***“for if we consider what is transacted in the Church, there ought never to be a coming together without some fruit. There the doctrine of God is listened to, prayers are offered up, the Sacraments are administered. The fruit of the Word is, when confidence in God and fear of him are increased in us — when progress is made in holiness of life — when we put off more and more the old man, (Colossians 3:9) — when we advance in newness of life, etc. (Romans 6:4.) Sacraments have a tendency to exercise us in piety and love. The prayers, too, ought to be of use for promoting all these purposes. In addition to this, the Lord works efficaciously by his Spirit, because he wills not that his ordinances should be vain.”***

But unfortunately the way that the Corinthians were acting in their worship assemblies meant that there was actually something worse than merely an absence of good fruit, they were actually producing a bad effect so that they were as Paul put it coming together not for the better but for the worse.

Paul identifies this as the result of the internal divisions that existed in that church, the word he uses there is *schismata*, from which we get our English word *schism*. Now schism or internal division or separation in the body of Christ is obviously something that should not be. All the metaphors in the

word for the church indicate to us that it is Christ's intention in building His church, that division is not his intention. The word speaks for instance of the church as the *Bride* of Christ, not the **Brides** of Christ. The church is made up of individuals but as Peter reminds us in 1 Peter 2:4 each of those living stones is being used to build up one spiritual house, that holy temple made without hands that Christ promised to build.

What is causing these divisions in the Corinthian church in part at least were the factions or parties in the church that Paul had been addressing since chapter 1. You remember that in 1 Cor. 1:11-13 he had written to them saying ***“For it has been declared to me concerning you, my brethren, by those of Chloe's household, that there are contentions among you.***

12 Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Christ."

13 Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”

Factions that preferred certain doctrines sprang up and inevitably this caused separations or divisions within the body as they shunned and argued with those who did not agree with them. Paul says that while he would rather not believe that things in the church are really as bad as the reports he was receiving, he is willing to believe them in part, because it is inevitable that such parties – in the Greek that word is *hereisis*, from which we get our English word *heresies* - will spring up even, necessary. There must be these factions he says. Now that should give us pause. What Paul, are you saying there have to be heretics in the church? So if a church doesn't have heretics, it's somehow deficient? Well no, if you don't have any heretics in your particular assembly, count your blessings and don't go seeking them out.

But what he means is that heretics are almost inevitable and that they actually serve a good purpose, you see Paul recognizes that in a fallen world were the Devil is actively sowing his tares among the wheat the fact is that not every member of the church will be true believers. As David Jackman put it:

“At base, this is a recognition that every congregation will be made up of genuine believers and superficial adherents, true disciples who follow in Christ's footsteps, and externalists who come along merely for the ride.”

And so how will we be able to distinguish between the genuine believers and the false? I mean it would be helpful if the tares among the wheat would agree to wear a little placard and ring a bell, but that hasn't happened yet in church history, in fact if history teaches us anything it is that the tares will maintain that they are wheat as vigorously as possible. What identifies them is the *heresies* they adhere to and the *schisms* they produce. The bad doctrine they believe and the bad fruit those doctrines produce. The value in seeing that, is that it throws those who are genuine believers into stark light, and allows the church to discriminate between the tares and the wheat. We'll talk more about that when we come to applications.

These factions and divisions were not only strictly doctrinal however, Paul points out that there are also social factors that were part of what we might today describe as unhealthy cliques that had formed in the church, and that in part these social factors were making the celebration of the Lord's Supper a hideous event.

Now you all know, that here at Providence at the end of the month, when we celebrate the Lord's Supper in the evening, before the service we have a fellowship meal. There we are to a certain extent following the practice of the apostolic church. While for us, the Lord's Supper is a token meal, in the

Apostolic church it's celebration followed an actual meal. Jesus you will remember celebrated the first Lord's Supper at the end of last Passover meal he had just celebrated with the Apostles. He used some of the bread they had been eating and the last cup that they drank. In the same way, the Apostolic church celebrated the Lord's Supper at the end of what they called an *Agape Feast* or a love feast.

The way that worked, was something akin to our pot-luck dinners, they brought their own food, which they were supposed to share and ate a common fellowship meal that was supposed to show their love for one another. What it actually showed was both their contempt for one another and the splits in the church.

The rich would arrive earlier than the poor and slaves who would have to work late, they would bring better food and wine, and they wouldn't want to share it with those who could only afford a little coarse bread and cheese or maybe a little fish. So they would selfishly eat their own food ahead of time and also get a considerable head start on finishing off the wine. By the time the slaves arrived, they would find the good food consumed, and the wealthy members of the church well on their way to inebriation. So they would have to eat what little they could bring and end up hungry, they would also inevitably end up feeling unwanted shamed and despised.

Far from producing a feeling a communion, this created division so that every "fellowship meal" drove the members of the church further apart, and they ended up as Paul had said worse off than in the beginning. Paul you remember had said in verse 2 "I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered *them* to you" now in a sarcastic comment he asks "Shall I praise you for this" – *oh look you're keeping the tradition of observing the Lord's Supper – and then answers* – I do not praise you. The way you keep this tradition is no keeping of it at all. To use the Mr. Knightley quote from *Emma* regarding her mistreatment of the penniless Miss Bates – **"Badly Done, Emma"**

In the next set of verses, Paul will correct their abuses and set forth the proper practice of the Lord's Supper, but now let us turn to applications.

Applications:

Are we being selective in our fellowship? Do we only associate with those Christians we consider to be "worthy" of association – and do we consider them to be worthy of our association because they are like us? What about Christ? Who did He fellowship with? If he had limited himself to those who were like him, he would never have entered into fellowship with any of us.

There is great consolation in these words about heretics for a church that is by schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed. I myself need to learn it, too often I am just depressed by the increase of heresy on all sides and the damage it does, but I need to hear what Calvin counsels, *We know, also, that the Lord, by his admirable wisdom, turns Satan's deadly machinations so as to promote the salvation of believers. Hence comes that design of which he speaks — that the good may shine forth more conspicuously; for we ought not to ascribe this advantage to heresies, which, being evil, can produce nothing but what is evil, but to God, who, by his infinite goodness, changes the nature of things, so that those things are salutary to the elect, which Satan had contrived for their ruin. - Calvin*

Heresy also is often the mechanism by which orthodoxy is defined.

Brothers and Sisters, it has been my experience that heresy and schism go hand in hand. Calvin identified the fundamental characteristics of schismatics in *alienation of affection, as when any one withdrew from the Church from envy, or from dislike of the pastors, or from ill nature*. Let us watch this in ourselves, we could all probably identify people who can never seem to find a church good enough for them, who no sooner are planted than dividing and causing division, we need to guard our own hearts from that by true self-sacrificing love to the brethren and a guarding of our doctrine. Let us not be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine

Finally remember brothers and sisters, the poor example of the Corinthians in the way they acted regarding providing for others and strive to remembering we are one and live putting others before us:

Phil 2:3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.

4 Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.