

COME TOGETHER: AS THE TRUE CHURCH

The first Sunday in March I began a communion series, working through [First Corinthians 11:17-34](#) a little bit at a time. We're continuing our study this morning in [First Corinthians 11:20-22](#). In March we saw that we are to come together for the better. This morning we will see that we are to come together for the true Supper of the Lord.

Let's pick up our context at verse 17:

[1 Corinthians 11:17-19](#) (2016 ESV) — **17** But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. **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.

The gathering of the saints should be a blessing, a time to be taught and encouraged in the Word, a time for fellowship in worship and prayer, a time of blessing one another. But no one benefited from the Corinthian gatherings. No one went home encouraged in the Lord and stronger in their faith. The proud and arrogant went home in greater pride and arrogance. The weak and struggling went home weaker and more discouraged.

Now Paul continues, and he identifies some serious issues with the church in Corinth. I'm going to present these as possible church names as we go.

THE CHURCH OF MISSED OPPORTUNITIES

- › [1 Corinthians 11:20-22 \(2016 ESV\)](#) — **20** When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat

They gathered and went through the motions, but didn't accomplish the Lord's purposes. They were saints who gathered together, but they never actually functioned as gathered saints.

THE CHURCH OF THE SACRED ME

- › **21** For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal

They were marked by self: self-approval, self-satisfaction, self-regard, self-boasting, self-confidence. But they were really self-deceived, self-harmed, and self-tormented. Paul spends a lot of time in [First Corinthians 12](#) showing that the church is a Body, a singular entity made up of joined members. Gifts of the Spirit are given to each one for the common good, not individual satisfaction or enjoyment. Hoarding ruins enjoyment of God's good gifts. He goes give TO us, but He also gives THROUGH us. If we forget "gives THROUGH," "gives TO" becomes sour and selfish.

THE CHURCH OF EXTREMES

- › One goes hungry, another gets drunk

Paul isn't exaggerating. There were poor people who could afford to bring little or nothing to the Lord's supper. There were wealthy people who might have even had servants to bring in their feast and lay it out for them. And then they treated the gathering of the saints like a restaurant, where one party at one table has nothing to do with another party at another table. They are as far as can be from the early church, where "all who believed were together, and had all things in common" ([Acts 2:44](#)).

THE CHURCH OF OUTWARD APPEARANCES

- › **22** What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in?

The wealthy and privileged made their wealth and privilege known to the rest. Ancient cultures, both Jewish and Gentile, wrongly believed that prosperity was a sign of blessing, and poverty and suffering was a sign of disapproval or punishment. The wealthy felt free to emphasize the difference between themselves and others, while also feeling no responsibility to help or aid those who were destitute. For their part, the destitute did not feel they were being mistreated; there was no concept of redistribution of wealth. But, that didn't relieve the wealthy of the responsibility to care for others who didn't have their privileges.

THE CHURCH OF THE UPTURNED NOSE

- › Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?

Centuries before Joel Osteen published his book, the Corinthians thought they had their “best life now.” If you are wealthy, God is pleased with you. If you are happy now, you will be even happier in eternity. The poor and suffering could only hope that God would have mercy on their.

THE CHURCH OF THE BASELESS ASSUMPTIONS

› What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.

It’s bad enough that churches embrace worldliness; it’s even worse that so many expect to be praised for their unfaithfulness. The church in Corinth really thought that Paul, or any of the apostles, would look at them and say, “Wow, now THAT’S what a church should be! So sophisticated! So worldly-wise! So open to anything!” They must have been deeply shocked when this letter was first read to them. They heard rebuke after rebuke after rebuke. I remember turning in homework assignments, thinking that I had done a perfect job, only to get back a note that said I completely missed it.

Perhaps of all their sinful tendencies – missing opportunities, being so individualistic, being so extreme in their practices, focusing so much on outward appearances, being so proud of who they were – this one was the worst, because it vaccinated them against correction. Their own self-approval, and the assumption that they had the apostle’s approval, would have rendered them largely unteachable.

Well, in light of who the Corinthians were, who should WE be?

THE CHURCH OF HOLY ANTICIPATION

Instead of The Church of Missed Opportunities, we should be The Church of Holy Anticipation.

Hebrews 10:24–25 2016 ESV

And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

When we gather together, we should have some anticipation, not only for what we will receive from the Lord, but what we will give to one another. The word “encouraging” has the sense of drawing alongside one another; we do that to give and to receive. If you only come to church expecting to receive, you’ll actually receive very little. Think of it this way. Your pockets can only hold so much. If they are full when you walk in that door, how can you fit more in? Only by emptying them out for the benefit of others (you do realize I’m not talking about money, but everything the Lord has given you to give to others?). If you come only to receive, you’ll quickly run out of room. But if you clear your pockets out – if you bless and encourage and strengthen others – you’ll find you have a lot of room to receive from others.

THE CHURCH OF THE SAINTS OF GOD

Instead of The Church of the Individual, we should be The Church of the Saints of God.

| [Ephesians 5:25–27](#) (2016 ESV)

Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish.

Being the Church is not like any other identity known to man. Jesus Christ died for us, and rose again, to sanctify us, washing us clean us with His Word, in order to present us to Himself as a holy, resplendent, spotless, flawless Bride. There is no room for boasting in ourselves, but how can we keep from boasting in the Lord Jesus Christ? The gathering of the saints is unmatched in the world, unparalleled among mankind.

We only see this small room, with a handful of people in it. The Lord sees His Bride gathered in glory, unified in His Spirit. Earthly eyes are unimpressed by what we are. But angels gather around us to protect and encourage us. The Spirit of God fills us to serve one another. The Word of God – God’s voice in written form – speaks love and blessing and abundant life to us. I love being in Christ, and so I can’t help but love being part of His Church.

THE CHURCH OF MUTUAL CONCERN

Instead of The Church of Extremes, we should be The Church of Mutual Concern.

[1 Corinthians 12:24-26](#) (2016 ESV)

But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

The spiritual Body of Christ is modeled after the human body. Actually, I think it's truer to say that God designed the human body to be a picture of what He intended His people to be throughout eternity. Just as our whole body reacts when we stub our little toe, and just as our whole body reacts at a pleasurable touch, the Body of Christ is to have mutual care and concern. Offenses divide us; forgiveness unites us. Personal needs divide us; prayer over those needs unites us. Weakness divides us; strengthening one another unites us. Grief and triumph can both be personal and divisive; we are to be united in one another's joys and sorrows.

THE CHURCH OF INWARD HOLINESS

Instead of The Church of Outward Appearances, we should be The Church of Inward Holiness.

1 Peter 3:1-4 2016 ESV

Likewise, wives, be subject to your own husbands, so that even if some do not obey the word, they may be won without a word by the conduct of their wives, when they see your respectful and pure conduct. Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear— but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious.

Worldliness invades the church in a number of ways. The so-called “seeker-sensitive” movement sought to adorn the Bride of Christ so as to attract the world; it was just another form of external adornment, a religious form of “braiding the hair and putting on jewelry.” It turns out that what we attract people WITH is what we attract them TO.

Churches that focus on profession quality music, so that Sunday morning is mainly a concert, must maintain that high level of performance or risk losing the people who come for the concert. Churches that make services fun and light and non-confrontational must continue to minimize the hard truths of Scripture, or risk losing those who will break for the exits the moment sin or judgment or hell is mentioned.

By focusing on Scripture instead of human opinion, by singing doctrinally rich songs rather than amusing ditties, by immersing ourselves in the Word of God instead of shallow how-to messages, we will attract those who want the depth and majesty of knowing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. To borrow a phrase from the fruit of the Spirit passage, there is no law against such things.

THE CHURCH OF THE OPEN DOOR

Instead of The Church of the Upturned Nose, we should be The Church of the Open Door.

1 Corinthians 1:26-31 2016 ESV

For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

Christians are often accused of thinking that they are better than anyone else. That can be a lie from the devil, in which case we can rejoice that we are persecuted for righteousness' sake. Or it can be true, and that's a shame. There should be no upturned noses here. No one here should ever think that they are a Christian because they are better or smarter or wiser than anyone else. We SHOULD BE convinced that we have been saved by the best King and best Savior and best Friend anyone could have, Jesus Christ. We have no reason to boast in ourselves; all our boasting should be in Jesus Christ. We should not say "Look what I did!" but "Look what He did in me and through me!" Every single person who comes through that door is someone God has brought here; for salvation, if they don't know Him; for sanctification, if they do.

THE CHURCH OF HUMBLE SUBMISSION

Instead of The Church of the Absurd Assumptions, we should be The Church Of Humble Submission.

The Corinthians really expected Paul to be proud of them, to praise them for all of their so-called "sophisticated" ways. They were like the church of Laodicea, described in [Revelation 3](#), which said,

Revelation 3:17 2016 ESV

For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.

Pride is a terrible sin even when it's accurate. When pride is actually self-deception in disguise it's truly tragic. A Christian or a church that has this attitude is unteachable. They are stuck in the mud of the world, and think they are soaring in the sky.

We are to be submitted to the Word of God in everything we do, as the Thessalonians were.

1 Thessalonians 2:13 2016 ESV

And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers.

When you and I read and hear the Scriptures in humble submission, then we read and hear it as God's Word, as God's own voice, as what Jesus Himself would say to us if He were hear today. We set aside personal preference and opinion, and instead submit to the Word of God. That is exactly what it means to be teachable.

BRINGING IT HOME

Well, I've set before you a number of churches.

Negatively speaking,

The Church of Missed Opportunities

The Church of the Individual

The Church of Extremes

The Church of Outward Appearances

The Church of the Upturned Nose

The Church of the Absurd Assumptions

Positively speaking,

The Church of Holy Anticipation

The Church of the Saints of God

The Church of Mutual Concern

The Church of Inward Holiness

The Church of the Open Door

The Church of Humble Submission

If we were to change the name of our church today, which list would you want to draw that new name from?

The strange thing is, we are sure to be a mixture of positive and negative. Every Christian is in a state of spiritual growth. Some might assume that everything they hear will be happy and positive, and refuse to humbly submit to the Word. Some might focus on their own experience, and miss the presence of the Saints of God. We must learn, and that takes time.

As we come to the Lord's Table, however, we know what He desires of us. We know that He wants the positive traits to be true of us as individuals and as a fellowship of believers.

Let's take a moment with the positives on the screen to let the Lord examine our hearts. If you lack some of these, confess that, and ask for His help in joyfully, gladly embracing His will. To the extent that the positives are true of you, give Him glory and thanks.

And then, let's join together in hope of who He is making us to be, and share in the Lord's Supper together.