

 **Main Street**  
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



**1 Corinthians 11:17-34**  
**“Good Table Manners”**

April 3, 2016  
(First Sunday After Easter)

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**“Following Christ From City Center!”**

# 1 CORINTHIANS 11:17-34 "GOOD TABLE MANNERS"

## 1) vv.17-22 OPENING EXHORTATION: PROBLEMS "WHEN YOU COME TOGETHER."

### a) vv.17-19 I Do Not Praise You.

17 a But in the following instructions I do not commend (praise) you, Rom. 16:23 Gaius As Host, Stern Tone  
because **when you come together** it is not for the better but for the worse. Link To 11:2 "Commend," Strongly Censured  
Destroy Community, v.17b, INDICTMENT 1

18 b1 For, in the first place, **when you come together** as church, Homes Of Wealthy (Architecture), vv. 18-19 = REASON 1

19 b2 I hear there are divisions (schisms) among you, and I partly believe it, 1:10-12, Oral Report? Mock Disbelief!

for 'there *must be* factions (divisions/heresies) among you' Divine Necessity, *dei*// Acts 20:35, Jesus' Agraphon

in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. Leaders Emerge, Truth Clarified

Acts 20:35, Justin *Dialogue* 35, *Didascalian* 65

### b) vv.20-21 Paul's Description of Their Behavior Which Mocks The Lord's Supper: Eat.

20 **When you come together**, it is not the Lord's supper (dinner) that you eat. v. 20= INDICTMENT 2

21 For in eating, one devours *his own* meal, and one is hungry and another is drunk. vv. 21-22=REASON 2

What Is Social Context, Rich Brought *Own Meal*

### b') v.22a Paul's Shock and Anger at Their Treatment of the Poor: Breaks Unity: Eat.

22 Q1 What! Do you not have **houses to eat in**? Honor/Status, Sociological Rift, Offended By Elite Behavior

Q2 Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? Feel Second Class

### a') v.22b I Do Not Praise You!

Q3,4 What shall I say to you? Shall I commend (praise) you in this? No, I will not commend (praise) you! //v.17a

Class Divisions May Corrupt Worship

## 2) vv.23-26 RESOURCES FOR THE PROBLEM: TRADITION OF LORD'S SUPPER.

"For" = Reason For v.22c

### a) v.23a Introduction: What Paul Formally Received (Technical Rabbinic Formula).

23 For I received from **THE LORD** what I also handed on to you, //15:3, Jerusalem, Early 30's?

From Lord, To Apostles, To Paul, To Corinth

### b) vv.23b-24 Bread Action + Bread and Remembrance Saying. 4 Actions:

24 1 'That **THE LORD JESUS**/ on the night he was handed over/ took bread. 1) Took

2 and when he had given thanks, 2) Jewish Blessing/ *Berakah*, *eucharisteo*, Gave Thanks

3 he broke it and said, 3) Broke

4a "This is my body which is for you (*you all* = pl). Is. 53:12, 4) Gave + New Formula

b This do for my remembrance (*anamnesis* = recalling)." m. Pesahim 10:4-5, "As my memorial"

His Self-Emptying Love, Right Words, Wrong Actions

### b') v.25 Cup Action + Cup and Remembrance Saying. //Lk. 22:15-20

25 1-2 In the same way also the cup, after supper, saying, Cup After Passover Meal // Lk's Account

4a "This cup is the *new* covenant in my blood. Formula //Jeremiah 31:31-34

b Do this, as often as you drink it, for my remembrance.'" Ex. 12:14, 24:8, Seal New Covenant

### a') v.26 Conclusion: Paul's Commentary on the Tradition.

Jesus' Story Is Enacted

26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, Repeated Actions Together

you proclaim (present)/ **THE LORD'S** death (past)/ till he comes (future). New World, Enact It Together

## 2') vv.27-32 GOD'S JUDGMENT ON ABUSES AND OUR SELF-CORRECTION.

### a) vv.27-29 Necessity of Self-Examination: Eat.

Responsible For Death, Dt. 19:10

27 a1 Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup in an unworthy manner vv.23-25, Not Personal Sin, Social

a2 will be guilty (liable for) the body and blood of **THE LORD**. Answerable, Reject The New Reality Of Jesus

28 b Let a man (woman) so examine him/herself,

b' and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. Cure

29 a'1 For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body *Didache* 14:12, *Body* = Unity With Other Christians

a'2 eats and drinks judgment on him/herself. Are We One Body In Jesus Christ?

### b) vv.30-32 Necessity of Self-Judgment: Eat.

Sickness Has 4 Sources: Fall/Self/Satan/God

30 a This is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. // Israel In 10:7-10, v. 30 = Present Danger

31 b But if we judged ourselves truly, Self-Examination In A Much Larger Drama

b' we should not be judged. p.v.= by the Lord, Suffering Not Necessity, Heb. 12:7

32 a' But when we are judged by **THE LORD**, we are chastened, so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

## 1') vv.33-34 CONCLUDING EXHORTATION: "WHEN YOU COME TOGETHER."

2 Rules

33 a So then, my brethren (and sisters), **when you come together** to eat, receive one another. //Rom. 15:7, Hospitality

34 b If any one is hungry, let him eat at home, lest **you come together** to be condemned. p.v., Worship Is Dangerous

b c About the other things I will give directions when I come. Not Cover All Issues Here, Face To Face Is Better

## GOOD TABLE MANNERS

*“For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you....”*

Standing within a gospel tradition he faithfully passed on, that was Paul.

### I CORINTHIANS 11:23a

**B**y any account, Sara Miles is an unlikely convert. Raised atheist, Sara lived an enthusiastically secular life as a chef and lesbian left-wing journalist who covered revolutions round the world. Sounds like a great guest for afternoon talk, maybe *Ellen* or *The View*! But early one winter morning, she wandered into a church. “I was certainly not interested in becoming a Christian,” she writes, “or, as I thought of it... a religious nut.” In her memoir *Take This Bread* she writes:

“... when I was forty-six, I walked into a church, ate a piece of bread, took a sip of wine. A routine Sunday activity for tens of millions of Americans—except that up until that moment I'd led a secular life, at best indifferent to religion, more often appalled by its fundamentalist crusades. This was my first communion. It changed everything. Eating Jesus, as I did that day to my great astonishment, led me against all my expectations to a faith I'd scorned and work I'd never imagined. The sacrament turned out to be... the bread of life. In that shocking moment of communion, filled with a deep desire to reach for and become part of a body, I realized that what I'd been doing with my life all along was what I was meant to do: feed people. And so I did. I took communion, I passed the bread to others, and then I kept going....”<sup>1</sup>

She soon turned the bread she ate that morning into tons of groceries piled on a church's altar. Her first food pantry provided hundreds of the poor, elderly, sick, and marginalized with food and a sense of belonging. Eventually the loaves multiplied; she and those she served started nearly a dozen more pantries.

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<sup>1</sup> Edited, *Take This Bread* (New York, NY: Ballentine Books, 2008), xi.

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**I Corinthians 11:17-34. . . . . 4**

What we do with food and who we eat with are important. It's not a party without food, and on extra-important occasions we use linen and silver and the good china. How we celebrate Communion speaks volumes. For only the minister to serve says something different than when laity assist in serving. To exclude children, as some churches do, teaches something. Since as Methodists we baptize them, we feed them as well; they're in the family and eat at the table. Not to make arrangements for the sick or disabled is a negative symbol. To take the elements to them in the pew and beyond that into their homes as we do is a powerful gesture of hospitality, because in it we say, "You belong; you are not forgotten."

We enact our faith at the table. Someone said, "Here we make believe in order to make ourselves believe."<sup>2</sup> It's no accident that *hospice* and *hospital* and *hospitality* have the same root. It's where the first word to the sick and dying— and that's all of us— is *Welcome; we're so glad you found us*. Black and white, rich and poor, educated and street smart, saint and scoundrel, *been here* and *come here* don't determine the guest list; Jesus does. It's his supper. Here we lay the burdens of our distinctions down in favor of a new identity. "This bread is me for you," said Jesus. The Lord's Supper— as Paul calls it— is an offer to enter God's protest against the way the world is now run. It's an appetizer for the full meal of the kingdom of God, and its intent— as with all appetizers— is to stir our vital juices and heighten our anticipation of the real thing. Jesus is the meal who makes us hungry for more! But there was a problem in Corinth. A meal given to break down barriers had degenerated into one more occasion for the entitled to indulge and the lesser to be humiliated, thus keeping the old pecking order in good shape.

It's hard to imagine this happening the year and a half Paul was present,<sup>3</sup> but after his absence, they apparently fell back into old ways. The social patterns of the surrounding culture encroached on the Lord's Supper and its new way of being together. The newly Christian *haves* needed to lay down social privilege and show respect for the *have nots*; on the other hand, the newly Christian *have nots* need to understand their worth is in Christ, not the old system, and it's hard work for both groups to live into the new reality of common ground in Jesus Christ. Holding together a church of different classes and cultures and races and tastes in music is an enormous task in a consumer culture like ours. But this is precisely what the

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<sup>2</sup> Robert McFarlane, *Christianity Today*, Vol. 34, No. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Acts. 18:11.

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**I Corinthians 11:17-34. . . . . 5**

kingdom of God in Jesus means. We swim *against the tide* of our ingrained habits for the sake of a larger witness, which means the church must in some sense always be an *uncomfortable* place where all are stretched into new ways of thinking about old arrangements. It is not the divisions of this world that we are to reflect but the new reality Jesus offers us all.

**TURNING TO THE TEXT<sup>4</sup>**

Corinth was a major seaport, and Christians in that cosmopolitan crossroads were a new religious movement, a *superstitio* the Romans called it– something strange and suspect, only three or so years old as a local group when Paul’s first letter arrived by courier from across the Aegean in Ephesus. How their lives had changed since Paul first arrived with news of what the one God of Israel had done for all people (Gentiles included!) through his Son and Servant. In Jesus’ presence the new reality of the kingdom of God had broken in. Crowds were taught, disciples made, healings and exorcisms abounded. Wherever Jesus went, life changed. Then came a final confrontation with the authorities in Jerusalem, an ugly death, a surprise resurrection, appearances to hundreds, Spirit baptism, Lord’s Supper, world mission and final judgment. A new world was already on the way, “Thy kingdom come.” Some in Corinth trusted what Paul and believed; but working out the details was a challenge.

In the church at Corinth were Jews who now believed in Messiah Jesus; there were Gentiles who embraced Jewish ethics but resisted circumcision and in Jesus had found a way to be right with the true God without being made fun of in the public baths. There were a few of high social status and also craftsmen, freedmen and those still in the bonds of servitude. All sorts. Now to mold such a hodge-podge into a living witness to Jesus Christ was a big job, even for Paul, and that gives me hope.

The church at Corinth was a network of house churches held together by face to face relationships. They had no grand temples like those of the gods and goddesses that dotted the city, and no synagogue like the Jewish community. It would be nearly three hundred years before the church had its own buildings.<sup>5</sup> So we met in the

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<sup>4</sup> A good summary of recent research on 1 Cor. 11:17-34 is Ben Witherington, *Making A Meal Of It: Rethinking The Theology Of The Lord’s Supper* (Waco, TX: Baylor Press, 2007), Chapter 3, “The Table of the Entitled and the Table of the Lord,” 33-62.

<sup>5</sup> For a positive read of the much disputed Constantinian revolution, see Peter J. Leithart, *Defending Constantine: The Twilight of an Empire and the Dawn of*

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## I Corinthians 11:17-34. . . . . 6

homes of wealthier members who had space for gatherings, perhaps 30 to 50 people at the max. We were not, in those days, a *temple religion* with fine buildings but a *living-room religion*. And that's where the problems started, with the architecture and expectations that went with what you do at a formal dinner party.

The home of Gaius, one of the hosts of the church, was no doubt a villa like the ones recent archaeology has uncovered.<sup>6</sup> There was an entrance off the street which led into a partly covered courtyard where rainwater was gathered from the roof into a cistern.<sup>7</sup> Thirty or so could gather there. Next to this was a formal dining room where low couches were arranged around three walls for meals between Gaius and his friends.<sup>8</sup> Guests would recline, be served by household slaves, and engage in philosophical and religious discussion known as *symposia*. The supper, after a brief break, was followed by a drinking party, sometimes with female entertainments, which Paul earlier criticized.<sup>9</sup> It's what the privileged did and didn't think a thing about it. It's *our world*, and everyone understood the rules.

Have you noticed- as I have- that coming to Christ does not quickly change old

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*Christendom* (Downer's Grove, ILL: IVP, 2010), especially "buildings," 119-125, 302-305. We went from living rooms to basilica and adopted imperial ceremonies to match!

<sup>6</sup> Romans 16:23. For the archaeological diagram of the villa at Anaploga, see Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, O.P., *Saint Paul's Corinth* (Wilmington, DE: Glazier, 1983), 153-166; for a full color drawing, Preben Vang, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2014), "Romans Homes and Households," 158-159. On the text and its cultural assumptions, see Wayne Meeks, *The First Urban Christians* (New Haven, CT: Yale University, 1983), 67-73; Jerome Kodell, *The Eucharist in the New Testament* (Collegeville, MN: Glazier, 1991), 71-82; Charles Talbert, *Reading Corinthians* (Macon, GA: Smyth Helwys, 2002), 93-101; David Garland, *1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2003), 532-556; PHEME PERKINS, *First Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2012), 141-146. For imaginative narratives of first century worship, see Robert Banks, *Going to Church in the First Century* (Auburn, ME: Christian Books, 1980); Walter J. Hollenweger, *Conflict in Corinth & Memories of an Old Man* (Ramsey, NJ: Paulist Press, 1992), 1-36; Ben Witherington, *A Week In The Life Of Corinth* (Downer's Grove, ILL: IVP, 2012). See the appendix at the end of this sermon for the drawings.

<sup>7</sup> The *impluvium*.

<sup>8</sup> The *triclinium*, literally *three couches*.

<sup>9</sup> 6:9-20.

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**I Corinthians 11:17-34. . . . . 7**

social habits. After all, look how long it took the church in American to deal with slavery, and the fact remains that in some churches women are still not equals.<sup>10</sup> Deep structural change in a sinful world takes a long time. The real revolutions are the long, slow ones, like democracy and religious tolerance and the spread of free markets and public education and the equal treatment of women and minorities. One of the chief reasons they have not progressed as much in the Muslim world—particularly the Middle East— is that all these larger, long term changes presume a Christian cultural base and its deep effects on how the world is viewed. You cannot understand Western culture apart from the shaping power of the church and the Bible, our faith and our ethics, the institutions of education and health care we created.<sup>11</sup>

Formal meals in the ancient world were occasions to reinforce social distinctions. If you threw a banquet at a temple, your equals would receive more and better food than others you invited who were not of the same class. They were served poorer quality wine, tougher portions of meat, and sat in descending rank.<sup>12</sup> The banquet was the social map. You knew where you stood, who above, who below, who at your level. And when some of the prosperous Greeks and Jews in Corinth became Jesus people, they brought their social world with them, just as we do.

We all know about class issues; it makes us uncomfortable to talk about it because it grates against some of our democratic and Christian ideals. Things like a twenty-thousand dollar smile, where you live, where you went to school, job and bank account, the car you drive— if you have one, where you vacation— if you do, clothes, accomplishments, race, marital status, looks, and on and on. It’s a complex map, and we’re all aware of it intuitively. We’re most comfortable with people who are about where we are, but if we’re in a social setting with people much above or below where we see ourselves, tension is felt. We ask, *Do I belong here?* and perhaps, *What are they doing here?* Our comfort zones are well monitored.

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<sup>10</sup> See N.T. Wright, *Surprised By Scripture* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2014), Chapter 4, “The Biblical Case for Ordaining Women,” 64-82.

<sup>11</sup> For an academic sociological defense of this large claim, see Rodney Stark, *The Victory Of Reason: How Christianity Led To Freedom, Capitalism, and Western Success* (New York, NY: Random House, 2012); and— for a Catholic spin— Thomas Woods, *How The Catholic Church Built Western Civilization* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> Read the descriptions of Pliny and Martial on preferential fare in O’Conner, *Saint Paul’s Corinth*, 159-160.

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**I Corinthians 11:17-34. . . . . 8**

Social climbing, name-dropping, envy and shame are all part of social class. When I catch myself trying to impress someone, I immediately feel foolish. I'm a child of God. Why am I doing this? We're all a bit unsure of our place and worth. Our job is to make sure what we share in Jesus is more basic than any of the divisions— political, cultural, and economic— that divide us. At communion we practice the etiquette of the new reality; our deepest identity is not earned but bestowed. We are God's kids, made in the divine image, re-created in Christ for a new future, washed clean in baptism and given a new identity by the Holy Spirit. Social class is symbolically obliterated at the table. The world has not yet changed, but we have! Every mountain is brought low, every valley lifted up. The ground at the foot of the cross is level, and to it we return at every communion

It's a typical Sunday evening in 55 AD, the end of the first work day in the Roman week. Everyone knows the gathering of the believers is to be held in the home of Gaius. Wealthier and higher status members arrive early. As custom dictates, they bring their own stocks of fine food and wine. They recline in the formal dining room and discuss matters of city affairs and Christian faith. After a while they're full, and after a few cups of fine wine getting tipsy. Nothing odd here; it's just what's done among elite peers in Corinth. It was pre-conscious, and Paul helped them to see the meaning of their blind habits. Such awareness is painful; it is for me.

But there are others who drift in. Many are slaves and come when the day's work is done in the city and down at the docks. They have nothing to bring but themselves. They come later and— as lower in honor— position themselves outside the dining room in the atrium where they stand or sit. Around the corner they hear conversation and laughter; they hear burps from full bellies as their stomachs groan. Only when the private banquet is finished and the better foods eaten will the simpler meal of bread and wine— *the Lord's Supper*— be shared with the whole community amidst readings, songs, group prayer, and the exercise of spiritual gifts, including prophecy. They waited; after all, the same social map was inside their heads as well.

The church was new in Corinth; it hadn't changed the world; in fact it hadn't changed its own members that much yet since the old social maps remained in place. Is this the new thing Jesus came to create? Something's wrong! The architecture and the social attitudes are tearing the church into pieces. Gaius the generous host has opened his home and provided the bread and wine? What a great guy! What more is expected? All this riff-raff hanging out at the villa every Sunday evening. His old associates in city governance just don't understand. But it all depends on where you're sitting, in the dining room full and tipsy, or in the atrium thirsty and hungry?

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**I Corinthians 11:17-34. . . . . 9**

It still surprises me the number of people who when I ask, “Do you know anyone who is poor?” return a blank stare. But never nurses or teachers. It surprises me the people whose life is spent with people pretty much like themselves. One of the privileges of my calling is the freedom to move across the spectrum from gated enclaves to dilapidated rentals. I see it all, and what I’m reminded of is that privilege and poverty both need Jesus and the changes he brings.

**Church Problems Are Normal (vv.17-22)**

Paul was not there, else he would have corrected the problem. He heard about the troubles and wrote a letter, a paragraph of which is before us.<sup>13</sup> And now that we know something of the landscape, Paul’s response makes sense. He begins in verses 17 and 18 with two insights: 1) Not all church meetings are for the good, and 2) conflict is an opportunity for mature Christians to move into leadership. “When you come together it is not for the better but for the worse.... there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized.”

Every church has a history, and if you poke around in the history of Main Street you’ll find a written or oral record of meetings that did more damage than good. Harsh words were spoken and wounds inflicted. Some left; others stayed and chose sides. When sinners, even forgiven ones, try to live together, problems develop. So Paul begins with a dose of realism. Church squabbles are bound to happen, but when they do, look around for who keeps a cool head; look around for who is able to listen and find a good solution; look for those who keep the welfare of the church in mind; these are the leaders God is calling forward. As Paul said, “...that the genuine among you may be recognized.”

Then, in verses 20 through 22, Paul shares what he’s heard and makes an initial response. You can feel his blood pressure rising as he dictates words that would be read in the next gatherings in Gaius’ home. “Who are you kidding? This is not the Lord’s supper you’re eating but your own. For in eating, one devours his own meal, and one is hungry and another drunk.”

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<sup>13</sup> The Revised Common Lectionary uses 11:23-32 as the Epistle reading for Holy Thursday, thus separating the words of institution from the social setting of the larger thought unit (11:17-34). The rich context and much of the theology is lost. This is the main reason I prefer preaching through books of the Bible and using their internal rhetorical units than following the lectionary with its selective snippets.

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## **I Corinthians 11:17-34. . . . . 10**

Who's Paul speaking to? The folk in the atrium? No. The eight to ten good ole boys in the dining room, Gaius and his friends. Paul was furious the humble were being humiliated. "What! Do you not have houses to eat in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you in this? No, I will not praise you."

In a healthy church the rich are aware of the poor, not just institutionally but personally, and the poorer do not feel put down but rather lifted up by the way the church conducts itself. In the space of an hour I can pray with a person whose biggest concern is the money they've made or lost that day in the stock market, then sit down with another who needs food and money for a prescription. Some eat gourmet every night; others shop with stamps. I'm glad for this tension, because if we can learn to hold the two together in wisdom and love we can be a window into the kingdom.

### **The Tradition And Commentary (vv.23-26)**

To correct the situation Paul did not speak on his own authority. Rather, in the middle section, verses 23-26, he refers to the actions and words of Jesus. This is helpful. When conflicts emerge, the appeal is not just to this or that group and their prejudices but to the founder of the community, to Jesus and the values he exhibited. The Lord's Supper is not a ritual Paul invented. He received it as a sacred tradition which he then faithfully passed on. It's what rabbis did. They specialized in the memorization of oral traditions: verse 23, "For I *received* from the Lord what I also *delivered* to you..." Remember, said Paul. Remember when I first told you the story of Jesus. Remember when you were baptized and we shared the meal for the first time? Let's go back to the basics.

At the center are the words and act of Jesus, first the bread and then the cup, a last Passover meal with his associates. They'd eaten hundreds of meals together before this last one. But this night he used the same four actions and added new words. The bread is him, a symbol about to become a reality in his death and resurrection. And the cup, it is the seal of the new covenant in his blood. *Do this*, he said. Remember me, who I am, what I've done. Remind the Father of his promises and make your prayers with confidence. I will be there, not as I am now, but in a new way as my Spirit is in your midst, giving light and stirring up gifts.

What Jesus did at the table that night was to bind his followers together in a new unity around himself. And anything that ruptures our new common identity in Jesus Christ is not to be tolerated. What we share in him must be counted as of more

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**I Corinthians 11:17-34. . . . . 11**

value than anything that divides us. God wants a new people who believe and behave differently. We don't ignore distinctions of class and race as if they weren't real; we just don't let them cut us off from one another. Class consciousness is hard to get rid of. So is race consciousness. So are all the other little ways we put one another down and prop up our little egos. And we pastors are among the worst offenders.

In verse 26 Paul added his own commentary on the tradition. "We proclaim— *in the present*, the Lord's death— *in the past*, until he comes— *in the future*." This is a big story, as broad as time and unfolding into a future appointment with the Lord who stands at the end of history. We are rooted in Jesus' history and have a date with destiny. Therefore, it's important we get the symbols right. A church that listens to the poor will have the ear of the Lord. There were two churches in Corinth, one in the banquet room, the other in the lobby. It was a big problem.

**Discerning The Body (vv.27-32)**

The next section, verses 27 through 32, are as misread as any verses in the Bible. At times I wish Paul had left them out. Some stay away from church on communion Sunday because they don't feel worthy.<sup>14</sup> They see communion as a showcase for the morally advanced rather than God's open table for sinners. To eat *unworthily* in this passage has little to do with how you rate your moral progress and everything to do with horizontal relationships with other people. Originally it had to do with the mistreatment of the poorer members of First Methodist Corinth. To *discern the body* is not to decide whether or not the bread and wine are the body of Christ but to see that the person down the pew from me is a member of Christ's body. And if can't see that, it doesn't matter a whit whether I believe Jesus is alive and present with us in the bread and cup. The first question is not, Am I right with God? but, Am I right with my brothers and sisters? Get right with your brother or sister, then bring your offering: this was Jesus' counsel.<sup>15</sup> Ours faith has tremendous social implications, and it starts right here at the church.

There are basically four sources of illness. First the fallen world in which we all participate. The world is not as it ought to be all the way down to the genetic level. This will be healed at the resurrection. All are frail; all get sick; all die. A

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<sup>14</sup> For a pastoral treatment of *worthiness*, see *This Holy Mystery: A United Methodist Understanding of Holy Communion* in *The Book of Resolutions 2004*, 903-904.

<sup>15</sup> Matthew 5:23-24.

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**I Corinthians 11:17-34. . . . . 12**

second related source is the disease we bring on ourselves. Alcoholics get cirrhosis; smokers cancer; the promiscuous STD's; the obese Type II diabetes; type A's burn themselves out on adrenaline. We hurt ourselves much of the time. This aspect is healed by awareness, by repentance, by a new lifestyle with lots of social support. AA and Weight Watchers are both based on this insight. To live well, live smart!

A third source of illness is that which comes to people through involvement with supernatural evil, Satan and his powers. The occult destroys and degrades. This is healed through repentance, deliverance, and the maintenance of spiritual freedom. Jesus did a lot of work in this area, most of which we conveniently ignore because it doesn't fit our world view. A fourth source is disease, and even death, that comes from God as a judgment to raise our pain level and perhaps soften our hard hearts. Would a loving God do that? Apparently so. Ask Ananias and Sapphira who were struck down for laying about a real estate deal.<sup>16</sup> Verse 32 is sobering and needs to be taken at full strength, "But when we are judged by the Lord we are chastened, so that we may not be condemned along with the world."

It takes spiritual discernment to know which of the four is the root cause or what combination thereof. The church lives in both the grace and judgment of God. How else could Paul say "This is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died." Remember the hymn, "He has sounded forth the judgment that shall never call retreat," he is even now "sifting out the hearts of men before his judgment seat. Oh be swift my soul to answer him..." The judgments of God are not just then and there but here and now.

But in the midst of judgment there is hope for hard hearts and hard heads. In God's light we can examine and correct ourselves so God doesn't have to. We can pray with David, "Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts. And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!"<sup>17</sup>

I recommend self-examination. I see many Christians sleep walking through life, letting someone else do their thinking for them and never learning God can speak to them. And even when we don't judge ourselves and God brings discipline, it's for our good. So Paul wrote in verse 32, "But when we are judged by the Lord we are

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<sup>16</sup> Acts 5:1-11.

<sup>17</sup> Psalm 139:23-24.

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**I Corinthians 11:17-34. . . . . 13**

chastened, so that we may not be condemned along with the world.” Better a little pain now than a lot later. In the church we are to live a different way, *the Jesus way*. At communion we practice laying aside false identities for the only one that finally matters: disciple of Christ, child of God, brother and sister to one another. A church where the saints are engaging in self-examination and self-correction is a church where there will be little judging of others. When I’m open to God’s constant correction, there’s not much of a platform left for judging others.

In the final two verses Paul gives practical counsel to the affluent, “If you’re hungry, eat at home ahead of time. Save your symposia for another night of the week. Wait for the workers and slaves to arrive before you begin. Make all welcome; show love to the poor.” He did not tell them to quit being who they were, just to consider the feelings of others. Look at the church from the underside. He warned them of the consequences if they chose social privilege over Christian love. The church is where divisions are overcome. Manners matter.

**CONCLUSION**

Dr. Tony Campolo shares this story from his youth:

“Sitting with my parents at service when I was perhaps six or seven, I became aware of a young woman in front of us who was sobbing and shaking. The minister had just finished reading the passage that says, “Whosoever shall eat the bread and drink the cup of the Lord unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.” As the communion plate with its small pieces of bread was passed to the crying woman before me, she waved it away and lowered her head in despair. It was then that my Sicilian father leaned over her shoulder and, in his broken English, said sternly, “Take it, girl! It was meant for you. Do you hear me?” She raised her head, nodded, then took the bread and ate it. I knew at that moment some kind of heavy burden was lifted from her heart and mind. Since then, I’ve always known that a church that could offer Communion to hurting people was a special gift from God.”<sup>18</sup>

Come to the table. The risen Jesus wants to do business with you.

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<sup>18</sup> PreachingToday.com search under *communion*.

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