

Remember Me?

In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval. So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, for when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another gets drunk. Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? Certainly not in this matter! For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment. Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world. So then, my brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat, you should all eat together. Anyone who is hungry should eat something at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment. And when I come I will give further directions.

■ 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 NIV

"In the following directives I have no praise for you, for ***your meetings do more harm than good***. In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, ***there are divisions among you***, and to some extent I believe it." (1 Corinthians 11:17-18, NIV84)

1. Damage and divisions.

your meetings do more harm than good. In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you,

In this classical scripture portion, which has been read and reread over the observance of Communion, Paul is addressing something problematic. Damage is being done when the Lord's Supper is being observed and it is creating divisions among God's people.

I remember discussions even in my early days at CLC, when we spoke of the Communion service. I think that you experimented with different times apart from Sunday morning. The reason for this was that *people tend to needlessly exclude themselves from sharing this means of grace*.

I have memories, as a child, in the few times that I attended Church, of leaving following the service while others, those who were good enough, stayed to receive Communion. I can't honestly say that my pain was that I wanted to stay. It was the feeling that I was not good enough.

The admonition given, directed me to determine my access to God by looking within my heart and asking those very questions. Again, this may not have been the intent but this is what I was hearing. Likely because I never felt good enough in many different ways, to begin with.

The situation here was different. Communion seems to have been what Jesus did ... there was a meal and at the end people participated in the wine and bread as remembrance of Jesus. The whole meal was likely intended and perhaps celebrated at Passover.

Still damage was being done ... rather than people being drawn together they were fragmented.

This is a personal reason as to my own difficulty with supplying vision for the church. I believe it needs to emerge, grow and evolve from the people. If it is mine then I fall in love with it and define supporters and detractors based on their relation to what I have created.

I would not fight with my spiritual family over my own preferences. It is as wrong for the pastor to do this as it is for any one of us.

2. Differences

"No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval." (1 Corinthians 11:19, NIV84)

I am not sure that I know how to interpret this verse. I don't think that the intent is to establish a spiritual caste system where one is more spiritually insightful than another or more favoured by God than another.

To be different and to see differently is a gift from God. We are created uniquely to live uniquely. God desires and so do we, that there would be unity in His Church but often we interpret this as uniformity. We look the same, behave the same, believe the same. Church membership may be a better way to try to produce uniformity than unity.

We don't talk much about membership here. Everyone participates on equal footing.

And we are gifted differently. I defer to people based on giftedness and the humility that ought always to accompany it. In my marriage, I recognize that there are areas in which Elaine's perception is more trustworthy than my own and there are times when I am wiser to make decisions based on her insights than my own.

As a pastor, I see the same dynamics in the church. I pray and try to know who those people are when we need to make decisions as a church. Many times I simply look to those who have walked with God longer than I and have accumulated experiential wisdom and insight that I do not possess.

Of course there are differences among us. The differences make us stronger as we are able to embrace and appreciate them.

These are not the divisions that are mentioned earlier in the scripture portion. They are differences that allow us to know who to go to when we have questions in our own journey.

3. The determination that we are to make.

*"Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. **For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.**"*

(1 Corinthians 11:27–29, NIV84)

I remember a wonderful book that I read, twice some years ago now. It was called "The Abundant Christian Life" by Watchman Nee. I have many takeaways from the book. An early one was that the normal Christian life is something very different from the average Christian life. An average is determined by numbers and the crowd. Normal, however, from God's perspective is something quite different. The experience that He has for us ... that He would see to be normal is quite different. Most of us tend to live average Christian lives but hardly what God would call "normal".

Another takeaway was that ***no-one ever saved him/herself by navel gazing*** ... by excessive introspection. Communion, in my experience, bred this unprofitable navel gazing practice. I was constantly looking for worthiness within my heart, when it came to the things of God and my eligibility to participate.

Today, I understand that grace is something that I experience simply because God loves me relentlessly. It is in allowing myself to be fully loved by God that I am transformed. It is in my transformation that I am changed and in turn my behaviour changes. Approaching this backward as though the goal were behaviour modification rather than life transformation, is a fools errand. It doesn't work ... it breeds judgmentalism and pride of religion ... Pharisaism.

The determination that we are to make is in the last part of verse 29. Is Christ my focus? Am I recognizing Him for the Saviour that He is. Does my hope rest on who He is and what He has done?

"For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself."

Grace is always to be found in looking to Christ, not ourselves ... not the state of our hearts. As we see Him clearly, we see ourselves clearly, "in the light of His Glory and grace"

Lord Jesus, let me ***walk beside you*** today wherever you are going.

Let me ***stop with you*** today as you pause to minister to the hurting.

Let me help in some small way, as you give direction to those who, in despair or in rebellion, have lost their way.

Let me not run before you nor lag behind you. Call the cadence of my heart, for you have created its rhythms, and let me be in step with you.

Let me not forget that there will be many things that I might do on my own that are of ***no lasting value***.

May your communion guide me and remind me that my presence is dear to you and that ***sometimes, all that you want is for me to be with you***. My silence in Your Presence is more significant than my chatter. And when I am silent then You can speak and ***only then can I truly hear***.

Put my hand to those tasks which will outlive me. Let me be assigned the place of a ***servant*** this day, and every other, whose delight is to simply attend to you, to your greater agenda.

As we meet people today, I pray that they might be mindful of your singular Presence. Too many days, I have asked you to walk with me, in serving my own interests and goals, thinking that they would surely be your own. ***I KNOW that I cannot trust my own heart when I am leading***. I desire for the roles to be reversed in these remaining years. You are the Master! I am the bond-slave. So be it.

Karl