

Paul praised the Corinthian church in verse two of this chapter, commending them for remembering the traditions that were passed down to them. The previous passage addressed the tradition of women's head coverings, or today we could say modesty. Now we read of the correction for inappropriate behavior when carrying out the tradition of communion. 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.* 1 Corinthians 11:17 Gathering together with fellow believers should be a blessing to everyone, a foretaste of heaven. We share our hearts of praise for our Savior and share of how He has led us through the week. We encourage and pray for those who are struggling.

But when our gathering is not uplifting, it can do more harm than good. We are told not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together (Hebrews 10:25ⁱ), so we better do our part to make it a blessing. We make it a blessing by loving one another and considering others above ourselves. We do that by focusing on Jesus and refusing to be offended by critical comments. We overlook minor faults and the weaknesses of babes in Christ. We refuse to allow a spirit of criticism and fault finding to enter our thoughts.

The Corinthian church was failing to make their gatherings uplifting. Let us see if we see any of the same tendencies in ourselves. 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,* 1 Corinthians 11:18 Divisions and factions can result in good, separating true believers from pretenders and keeping the doctrine pure. But it can also develop for wrong reasons. Factions are listed as a work of the flesh (Galatians 5:20ⁱⁱ). The Greek word for factions in this verse and the word "divisions" in the Galatians verse is the word from which we get our word heresy. Paul is describing a division between the rich and the poor, which is class distinction. The lack of class distinction was something that made the church stand out as different from the world, for they valued every life as equally important to God, and all were caring for one another.

James describes how some churches give special honor to the wealthy who might attend a worship service. He rebuked them for ignoring the royal law of loving their neighbor as themselves and the sin of partiality (James 2:8,9ⁱⁱⁱ).

Factions usually form around personalities, as we saw in the first chapter (1 Corinthians 1:11,12^{iv}). One person has a different slant on an interpretation. That is fine as long as everyone humbly honors one another's opinions that are based on the Word. But when a person of influence begins speaking against another over trivial issues, or doctrines that are not clear, that is when division creeps in. A tell-tale sign is a group of people uttering the same negative catch phrase. The dissension usually builds privately. Often it is never brought up in a gathering. The dissenter is trying to build a group of followers to have influence and standing in the church. Ask if it is happening and they will usually deny it. If someone has told you about it, the dissenter will want to know who it was, not for confirmation, but so he or she knows not to include them in the future.

If it is not confronted in a church gathering, it will continue to grow. You don't have to name names, just the issue that is being addressed. Use Scripture. Identify factions as a work of the flesh. Show how Jesus prayed for unity (John 17:20,21^v). **Openness clarifies and purifies.** Dissenters seeking power or prestige have caused more church divisions than doctrinal differences ever did. In most cases, the faction that

separates from the church body dies out within a few years as people become annoyed with the new leader's ego (Galatians 6:7,8^{vi}).

Jesus said, "*A new command I give you: love one another as I have loved you!*" John 15:12 Think of how much Jesus puts up with us, and yet He continues to love us. That is the patient, enduring love we are to have toward one another. That builds the unity of the body. We are to build one another up, not tear one another down.

A good book on the subject is *Unintentional Dragons*. The influential people causing division often believe that they are really trying to help because they know best. They are often the ones who have been there a long time, and usually feel they are responsible, faithful, and need to direct the church. But they are rarely among the elders who teach and care for the flock. When they see their influence waning because the leadership of the elders is faithful to the Word and the congregation is appreciative of their leadership, they will begin to find fault, often regarding some unimportant tradition.

If leadership must address the church over the division or issues that are being misrepresented, they should let the dissenter know ahead of time so that they are not blindsided. (Don't use their name publicly or you open the church up to legal problems.) Address the issue with love and back everything with Scripture. Sometimes the person will not even attend and leave the church once they realize that the elders' authority will not be usurped. In a few cases, I have seen them quiet down and become a helpful part of the body. It is painful and time consuming, but it is a common occurrence in almost any organized group of people.

Divisions can also come from those who become prideful over what they believe their spiritual state is. Factions often form because of the pride of someone with insufficient understanding of the Word of God. That is the reason elders must not be recent converts, Paul writes that they may become lifted up in pride and fall under the condemnation of the devil (1 Timothy 3:6^{vii}).

¹⁹ for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. 1 Corinthians 11:19 Paul adds that there will always be factions. That is a relief to many pastors, for we think we must have done something wrong, or unwisely handled a dispute. While that might be the case, factions are always going to be a part of church life. The upside is that it reveals who is genuine. We cannot see what is in other's hearts, so we rarely know who is or is not genuine. But when factions form it becomes clear. The ones who are critical over insignificant things, or who make no attempt to bring the issue to leadership, or who try to secretly draw people over to their side on an issue rather than ask people to pray and seek the Lord, are not genuine. Genuine believers care deeply about unity (John 17:21^{viii}). They respect the God given leadership and their decisions, unless of course leadership is blatantly going against what is clear in Scripture.

One example of resistance to leadership that comes from those who are genuine is the stand against the woke movement sweeping into churches and denominations. If the preaching pastor or elders try to tell you that your skin color determines if you are oppressed or an oppressor, remind them that we are one in Christ and that we are all made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27^{ix}; 1 Corinthians 10:17^x; Matthew 16:27^{xi}).

²⁰ When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. ²¹ For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. ²² What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of

God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not. 1 Corinthians 11:20-22 It is the Lord's Supper- not your supper. It is not the place to indulge your appetite or to be selfish, quite the opposite. This may be the reason communion evolved into a single wafer and cup, so we can focus on the meaning and not on eating. The early church called it a love feast, as it was an entire meal.

The wealthy were free to come early and probably justified their behavior with the thought that they gave the bulk of the offerings that paid for the food. They were acting selfishly. When those who were released from a long day of labor arrived hungry, there were only scraps left. It was humiliating to the laborers for it declared it was all they deserved because they could only afford to give a small offering.

The way this verse is worded sounds like Paul was quite upset with this un-Christlike behavior. The opposite should have been true. If they loved one another, the wealthy would either wait for the others to arrive or only take a small portion knowing their brothers and sisters who were slaves would arrive late and be famished. Jesus asked us to remember Him in communion (Luke 22:19^{xii}), but they had turned it into something that misrepresented Him. No wonder Paul was so upset!

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, ²⁴ 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." 1 Corinthians 11:23,24 The tradition was a revelation from the Lord to Paul, though we find it written in the Gospels as well. Why did Jesus have to give His body? It is because the soul that sins must die (Ezekiel 18:4^{xiii}). Death is the just penalty for our rebellion against God. Jesus took our sins upon Himself and took the punishment for those sins so we could be free of our sin debt (Ephesians 1:7^{xiv}). Communion reminds us of the price Jesus paid to make this new covenant with us.

²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me." 1 Corinthians 11:25 Why do we need to remember the blood? The life of the flesh is in the blood (Leviticus 17:11^{xv}). The blood poured out means death. The body had to be broken for the blood to be poured out causing death, the just penalty for our sins. But there is more to it than we see just reading this passage. This is the fulfillment of a much older covenant promise. It just happens a few weeks ago at Jesus in the House we studied the origin of this in Genesis 15.

When Abram asked God how he could know that his heirs would inherit the land promised to him by God, the Lord told him to prepare a covenant ritual (Genesis 15:8-10^{xvi}). Animals were cut in half and each half laid on opposite banks of a small ravine. The blood of the animals would run down to the middle. The representative of the tribes making a covenant would stand at each end of the ravine and walk through the blood and around the half of the animals on each side. After each representative had done so, they met in the middle, exchanged purses, weapons, and sometimes even their firstborn sons.

Symbolically this meant that if either side broke the covenant their body would be torn like that of the animals. Their wealth was available to the other tribe. Their weapons used to defend one another. This was an irrevocable union of the tribes.

But when God made the covenant with Abram to assure him of the promise, God put Abram in a trance. God alone went through the blood for them both (Genesis

15:12^{xvii};17^{xviii}). In other words, if Abram or his descendants failed to keep the covenant, God would pay the penalty! What a lopsided agreement. But how it must have reassured Abram.

The Jewish people failed to keep the covenant in that they turned against God and worshiped idols. So just as God vowed in the dramatic form of the covenant with Abram, God in the flesh, Jesus our Savior, was torn and bled for the failure of Jewish people to uphold their part of the covenant. But it was not for Jews alone. In Romans 4 Paul explains that the people of faith are heirs with Abram of the promises regardless of our ethnicity (Romans 4:16^{xix}).

When we partake of communion, we are remembering God's faithfulness to fulfill His promises, and that He loved us enough to take what we deserved upon Himself. He knew Abram or his heirs could not keep it, and yet he wanted Abram to know His promises were certain to be fulfilled. The promises go all the way back to Genesis chapter three where God promised the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent (Genesis 3:15^{xx}). Communion is not just celebrating the New Covenant, but assurance that God is faithful to His word no matter the cost to Himself. His love for us is beyond our comprehension. All history over the millennia came to the climax on the cross that we celebrate in communion. He did all this because He loves you and me. Communion celebrates that love that was promised so long ago when God walked alone through the blood. And He did give us His only Son, the firstborn.

²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. 1 Corinthians 11:26 Every time we celebrate communion, we remind ourselves that we are saved because of what Jesus did for us on the cross. That is why it should be a time of reflection, remorse, and repentance, and gratitude. It should be done with our thoughts focused on all that it means to us. You would never indulge yourself in satiating your appetite while standing at the foot of the cross.

But we also know our debt is paid and that we only need that proclamation until He returns. That is why it is also a time of joy, comfort, and hope. When He returns, we will no longer proclaim His death for all will know of it (Hebrews 8:11^{xxi}). We will be reveling in His life in ways we have only begun to experience now. The work in us will be finished (1 John 3:2^{xxii}). We will experience eternity in His presence! That is the only real "happily ever after."

²⁷ Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. 1 Corinthians 11:27 Without the blood of Jesus, none of us is worthy to take communion, but Paul is speaking here of doing so with indifference. If we take communion lightly like any daily meal, we are taking the physical suffering of Jesus for us as a trivial thing. If we do so without loving His body, the church, we make light of the greatest love ever shown. It is to make a mockery of that sacrifice that was to make us one in Him. It is like Uzzah's hand on the ark of the covenant (2 Samuel 6:6,7^{xxiii}), making lite of the holiness of God.

If one is afflicted by sin, the Supper is comfort. If an individual is comfortable with sin, the Supper is affliction.^{xxiv} Repentant hearts yielded to God to do whatever He directs, find the comfort that table offers. If the heart is hardened and unwilling to forgive, resistant to God, or apathetic, we should refrain, or we will find ourselves under God's severe discipline. We will have taken the most precious gift ever given as a trivial thing unworthy of reverence.

²⁸ *Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.* 1 Corinthians 11:28 So first we examine our hearts! As a member of the body of Christ who gave His life for us, how are we acting toward others in the body of Christ? What is our attitude toward what this represents? Does it break our hearts that Jesus chose to do this to save us? Think about the wonder of what was done, and then take communion in reverence and awe, and with a heart full of gratitude.

²⁹ *For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.* ³⁰ *That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.*

³¹ *But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged.* 1 Corinthians 11:29-31 To take communion lightly is to invite God's judgment upon oneself. Some in the church of Corinth were sick and even died because of that judgment. God was trying to show them through affliction that their attitudes were offensive to Him. Paul spelled it out so they would understand what was happening.

The church didn't recognize judgment when it came. I have seen the same thing. A person declared they were determined to disturb the peace in a church, and night before they intended to do so they became very ill. I asked if they discerned the reason, but they just couldn't see it. That was what was happening in Corinth, and it happens in our day. If we will examine our hearts and see what the issue is, we can avoid that severe discipline.

I know some people consider church like a club. You can come and go as you please, attend or not attend on a whim, but God sees our unity as so much more. We are the bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:32^{xv}). As individuals that make up the bride, we are sullyng her or adding to her glory. **The woman is the glory of her husband, so we are bringing shame on our Savior or glory to Him.** Our unity and worship together are a much more serious things than most of us understand. That is why factions are so sinful and destructive.

³² *But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.* 1 Corinthians 11:32 Illness can be God's discipline to keep us from going the way of the world. It is God's love to redirect our paths and break our hearts over our sinful attitudes. This verse is a severe warning, for it implies that if we remain hardened, we will be condemned with the world. It seems that if that is the case, we never were truly born-again.

³³ *So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another—*
³⁴ *if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for judgment. About the other things I will give directions when I come.* 1 Corinthians 11:33,34 Paul is reminding them to act in love and concern for one another. And that should be our behavior as well. There were more instructions to be delivered when Paul arrived, but this was one of the most pressing ones that needed to be addressed quickly for the physical and spiritual health of the congregation. The factions seem to be the wealthy versus the slaves. How amazing it was that a slave could be the church overseer of his master! What a statement to the world, that is unless the master didn't act like he respected his overseer. That is what was happening, and similar situations happen today. The wealthy can be tempted to despise the poor elder or vice versa. Whenever we put ourselves in a different group from our brothers and sisters in Christ for any reason, social, economic, ethnicity, or education, we are forgetting what matters. We are *all* sinners saved by grace (Ephesians 2:8,9^{xvi}). That is what makes us family. Ex-con,

baker, business owner, corporate executive, gardener, we are one in Christ. None of us is more important than another (1 Corinthians 12:7^{xxvii}). We will see that emphasis in the next chapter.

That is one reason the world cannot quite figure us out. We do not fall into their prejudices and clicks. It is a harmony of different notes by various instruments that makes Jesus' symphony beautiful.

While Jewish men prayed, "I thank you God that I was not born a woman or a slave or a Gentile," the church at Philippi began with an Asian business woman, a Greek slave girl, and a Roman soldier and probably a few prisoners. Thank God for John 3:16. God so loved the *world*...That means there is hope for you and me. ⁷ *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God.* 1 John 4:7 Let us celebrate communion with these truths in our minds and hearts.

Questions:

- 1 What was the problem being addressed?
- 2 What is the source of factions?
- 3 In what way are they helpful?
- 4 How did class distinction affect communion?
- 5 Why was Paul so upset?
- 6 Why did Jesus have to give His body? Blood?
- 7 Why is it so irreverent to take communion lightly?
- 8 How do we examine ourselves first?
- 9 Why were some ill and even died?
- 10 How do we apply this today?

ⁱ **Hebrews 10:25 (ESV)**

²⁵ 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.

ⁱⁱ **Galatians 5:20 (ESV)**

²⁰ idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions,

ⁱⁱⁱ **James 2:8-9 (ESV)**

⁸ If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing well.

⁹ But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors.

^{iv} **1 Corinthians 1:11-12 (ESV)**

¹¹ For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there is quarreling among you, my brothers.

¹² What I mean is that each one of you says, "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," or "I follow Cephas," or "I follow Christ."

^v **John 17:20-21 (ESV)**

²⁰ "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word,

²¹ that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

^{vi} **Galatians 6:7-8 (ESV)**

⁷ Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap. ⁸ For the one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life.

^{vii} **1 Timothy 3:6 (ESV)**

⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.

viii **John 17:21 (ESV)**

21 that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

ix **Genesis 1:27 (ESV)**

27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

x **1 Corinthians 10:17 (ESV)**

17 Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

xi **Matthew 16:27 (ESV)**

27 For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.

xii **Luke 22:19 (KJV)**

19 And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake *it*, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me.

xiii **Ezekiel 18:4 (ESV)**

4 Behold, all souls are mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the son is mine: the soul who sins shall die.

xiv **Ephesians 1:7 (ESV)**

7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace,

xv **Leviticus 17:11 (ESV)**

11 For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have given it for you on the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life.

xvi **Genesis 15:8-10 (ESV)**

8 But he said, "O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?"⁹ He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon."¹⁰ And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other. But he did not cut the birds in half.

xvii **Genesis 15:12 (ESV)**

12 As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him.

xviii **Genesis 15:17 (ESV)**

17 When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces.

xix **Romans 4:16 (ESV)**

16 That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,

xx **Genesis 3:15 (ESV)**

15 I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

xxi **Hebrews 8:11 (KJV)**

11 And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.

xxii **1 John 3:2 (ESV)**

2 Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.

xxiii **2 Samuel 6:6-7 (ESV)**

6 And when they came to the threshing floor of Nacon, Uzzah put out his hand to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled.⁷ And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah, and God struck him down there because of his error, and he died there beside the ark of God.

xxiv ¹ Stephen T. Um, [1 Corinthians: The Word of the Cross](#), ed. R. Kent Hughes, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 208.

xxv **Ephesians 5:32 (ESV)**

32 This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.

xxvi **Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV)**

8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,

9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

^{xxvii} **1 Corinthians 12:7 (ESV)**

⁷ To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.