

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:

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## 1 Corinthians 11:17-22, 33-34      “Manners for Church”

Intro. Have you ever attended a church and afterward felt that you should have stayed at home? Probably most of us have had that experience. In fact, in the last of v.17, Paul says that when the Corinthian church gathered together, they were worse off spiritually rather than better off spiritually. And when the church gathered together for a common meal, things were so bad that in v.22 Paul suggested that they would be better off staying at home.

How is it with you and our church? Are you better off spiritually when you worship at Swift Creek Baptist? Or do you go away worse off than when you came? If the latter is true, then we have a problem. Sometimes *you* are the problem. Sometimes other people in the church are the problem. Sometimes we are all at fault.

This morning I am going to identify some of the problems in churches that can make church attendance of no benefit. In fact, these problems can cause more harm than good. What we're going to talk about primarily has to do with our behavior in church gatherings. So we are first going to identify the problems in the first part of my message. Then we are going to offer the solutions to these problems.

Now the first step in solving a problem is to recognize the problem. So first of all today:

### I. AVOID THE PROBLEMS WE MAY FACE IN CHURCH

Based on this text of Scripture, I can identify 4 problem behaviors that we must avoid when we gather together as an assembly of believers.

A. Don't Divide God's People – He says in v.18a, “For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you...” Paul had heard from some concerned person that there were divisions among the Corinthian believers even at their church gatherings. As we see from the last part of v.18, he seems reluctant to believe the report. The apostle wanted to give them the benefit of any doubt. But it is clear from the rest of our text that he seems confident that the reports are accurate. As we see from Chapter 1 the Corinthians had already manifested divisions based on party loyalties. And Paul says in the first part of v.19, “For there must also be factions among you...” Paul was well aware that division cannot be entirely avoided. Because human nature is as it is, at least some divisions are inevitable. His use of “must” is similar to the way it is used in Mt. 18:7 where we read, “Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!”

Now let's try to understand the nature of these divisions in their assembly. What kind of division was going on in this church? In v.18 the word translated “divisions” is *schisma* in Greek. We get our word “schism” from this word. This word literally refers to a tear or a split. Then, in v.19 the word translated “factions” (*hairesis*) is a little stronger. This word refers to a situation where different people choose which group they are going to identify with according to doctrines, opinions, personalities, or other factors. If the problem is not corrected, the two or more cliques will often formally split from one another.

Now based on the context, I believe that the church was divided according to economic and social classes. As we shall see, there was a rift in the fellowship between the rich and poor. Now let's get the setting. The early New Testament church met in various homes throughout a city for instruction, prayer, and fellowship. But evidently all Christians in a city would gather together at one place in the evening at various times to worship and to observe the Lord's Supper. In fact, Paul says in v.20, "Therefore when you come together in one place...." Now the implication is clear that the intent of the gathering was to observe the Lord's Supper. But it is also clear from v.21 that their time together would begin with a full meal, perhaps similar to our covered dish meals. The early Church called this meal "the love feast" since its main emphasis was showing love for the saints by sharing with one another. In fact, Jude 12 uses this term for the Christian meals. Then at the close of the meal, they would observe the Lord's Supper. And so the Lord's Supper was part of a true supper for them.

There is scriptural support for this practice. When Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, it was preceded by the Passover *meal*. And in Acts 2:46 we learn that the church in Jerusalem started the practice of having a meal before observing the Lord's Supper together. At some point in church history this practice was abandoned. I would like to see us restore the practice, at least occasionally.

Now let's try to pinpoint the problem. Paul says in v.20, "Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper." Now when you combine that with v.21, Paul is saying, "Many of you are not coming to eat the *Lord's* Supper, but your *own* supper. For he goes on to say in v.21, "For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry...." What probably happened was the wealthier members in the church formed cliques of relatives and friends, who sat together and kept all the food that they brought for their own little group. They didn't share their drink either, but had too much of that as well. Some even got drunk at church! Furthermore, notice again in v.21 that some were taking their food ahead of others. Evidently, some of the wealthier people got there earlier than others. They got the best seats. They went ahead & ate their food before the others in the church arrived. The slaves & the working poor among them probably arrived later, after working a full day. They had little food to bring, and no food was left for them from the common meal, so they remained hungry, while the wealthier members of the church were full. One group of Christians had the best seats in the house, while the other group sat on the floor, or even tried to listen from the outside. So the church was divided. They were having their church meals like the people of the world, who separate themselves into little cliques. It is easy for people to find their own little circle of friends at church and lose the spirit of oneness, communion, and fellowship which God intends.

Now why were they divided? That leads to the other problem:

B. Don't Be Selfish – The kind of behavior that we see in v.21 is clearly just a case of selfishness. One group of Corinthians selfishly grabbed the food for themselves, and the so-called love feast became a display of greed and gluttonous self-satisfaction. Some were having a good time, not being concerned about all the people that are being excluded. They were being inconsiderate of others. Church ought to be the most loving place on earth, but too often Christians manifest selfishness even at church.

Now keep in mind that the primary purpose of their gathering was to observe the Lord's Supper. But selfishness destroyed their worship, and they lost any benefit from it.

You know, I have a problem with the modern American church. We are catering more and more to the selfish desires of people. Many people come to church with the attitude that says, "What's in it for me? What programs do you offer my children? How big is your youth budget?"

How entertaining are your services? Is our worship self-centered or Christ-centered? Are we interested in what we can get out of the services or in praising God through them?

C. Don't Despise the Church of God - Paul says in v.22, "Or do you despise the church of God...?" The "church" is not the building, but any place where believers assemble. And notice it is the church "of God." Has the congregation forgotten so completely that this is "God's gathering." The church is a special place, and it is to be treated as a special place with utmost respect. The church is different from a football game. You are to treat the church with respect. By their actions they were treating the church as no different from a worldly supper club.

My dear Christian friend, when you come to church, you need to recognize the special nature of our gathering. You need to watch your manners. Don't disturb others. Most of all, you should show respect and consideration for God!

D. Don't Shame the Poor - Furthermore, he says in the last part of v.22, "do you... shame those who have nothing?" The poor were put to shame when they arrived looking to share in the blessing of the meal, only to be turned away. Have you ever been excluded from the blessings that others in your group enjoy? It doesn't feel good, does it?

We must remember that in the church of God, God looks especially upon the poor. He does not put them to shame, nor will He have them put to shame by others (James 1:9, 10; 2:2-9). The church should be a place where people are loved and accepted regardless of how much money they make, or what their skin color is. We must forsake all class pride and feelings of superiority.

You know, I do wonder about singers who have a God-given gift for singing, who only sing for those who can afford a \$16-20 concert ticket. Should churches host a concert that is open to members & the public, and then charge for admission? Doesn't that bring shame upon people who cannot afford to participate? Doesn't that divide the poor from others?

So we have examined the problems we must avoid. And notice Paul's rebuke in v.22. He says, "What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in?"<sup>1</sup> Paul is saying, "If you are going to act like that, at least do it at home, not the church!" Brother, if you want to be a part of a clique, join some club in town, but don't turn the church of the living God into a social club! Now let's see Paul solution:

## II. APPLY THE SOLUTIONS

What are we to do to prevent or correct these kind of problems in our own church?

A. Remember the Purposes of the Lord's Supper - Keep in mind that the ultimate purpose of their gathering was not to enjoy a fellowship meal, but to observe the Lord's Supper. And what they were doing was contrary to the purposes of the Lord's Supper. That is why Paul could say in v.20, "Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper."

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<sup>1</sup> By the way, Paul is not implying that regular eating and drinking should not be done in a Christian assembly. Paul's point is that, if the rich wish to eat and drink on their own, enjoying better food than their poorer brothers, they should do this at home. They should at least keep the church's common meal free from practices that can only bring discredit upon it. Furthermore, Paul doesn't object to the well-to-do enjoying a reasonable quantity or quality of food in the privacy of their own families (v.22a). But in this church setting, not sharing their food equally with other believers was very inappropriate (vv. 22b).

So what are the purposes of the Lord's Supper? Well I will share the ones that are relevant to this context:

1. To Show & Proclaim the Lord's Death for Us – In v.26 Paul says, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes.” One way we share the Gospel with others is through the Lord's Supper. The bread reminds us of the body in which He suffered. The cup reminds us of the blood that He shed. And the good news is that if you place your faith in Jesus, He can forgive you of all of your sin. So the Lord's Supper is another presentation of the Gospel. For Paul, presenting the Gospel was always of paramount importance.

The Lord's Supper reminds us of the ultimate act of self-sacrifice and unselfishness. It was a contradiction for the Corinthians to act so selfish in association with the Lord's Supper.

Now this leads to another reason for observing the Lord's Supper:

2. To Show Love - The opposite of selfishness is love. 1 Cor. 13:5 says that love “does not seek its own.” So we should be more like the early Jerusalem church. Acts 2:44 says that they had all things in common and shared with those who had need. Some in the church were wealthy, and most were poor. Some were even slaves. The slaves could probably bring nothing to the meal, and the poor could hardly bring anything more than scalloped potatoes. But that should not have mattered, for love shares. Those who could bring more were to show their love by sharing their abundance with others.

3. To Show Unity – Look back at 10:16-17, where Paul says, “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.” I believe that when they observed communion, they all ate from a single loaf. That symbolized their unity in Christ. And yet, they were allowing their fellowship meal to divide the church! God's house, where Christians gather for worship, is the one place in all of the world where there ought to be a spirit of unity and communion. Phil. 2:2 says, “Be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.” All believers are one in Christ. In the Church of the living God there are no uppers and lowers, no slaves and slave masters. We are all one, united into one body through the baptism of the Holy Spirit (12:12-13).

This is why we often close our communion service by holding hands and singing, “We are one in the bond of love.” Yet the Corinthians were contradicting the very purpose of the Lord's Supper.

Now let's consider some specific solutions to the problems we have been talking about:

B. Share What You Have - An implication of this text is that the members of the church were expected to share their resources; the more well to do were to bring more than they needed and to make provision for the poor. The love feast should have been the best meal the poor would have eaten all week, but instead, many went away hungry!

Now there are some applications I want to make from this principle. First, if the Lord has blessed you with an abundance, bring some extra food to our fellowship meals. Let's make sure no one leaves hungry from one of our meals! Secondly, give to our benevolence offering. Have you ever wondered why we receive a benevolence offering on the Sundays we take communion? It is a long-standing tradition that is rooted in *this* passage of Scripture.

C. Be Considerate of Others – The Corinthians were failing in this miserably. The rich were only thinking of themselves. Remember, Jesus said, “inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” (Mt. 25:40).

Now one example of consideration is given in v.33, “Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.” Again, some of the Corinthians did not wait until everyone had arrived to share their meal with everyone. They went ahead & ate the food, and by the time some arrived, there was no food left! So Paul says, “Wait for one another.” By the way, this has become part of social etiquette to this day. You wait until everyone has been served before you eat. So always be considerate of others. By the way, the opposite is also true: don’t keep people waiting unnecessarily.

Before we move on, let me give you another application. Our sanctuary is getting more and more full on Sunday. This calls for considerate seating. Could I suggest that if you arrive a little early, go ahead and sit in the middle of the pew. Leave the outside seats for those who arrive later. Most visitors do not arrive early. Don’t make them climb over your knees to get to a seat. Be considerate of others!

D. Pass the Test of Spiritual Maturity – In v.19 Paul says, “For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you.” There he indicates here that even though division is bad for a church, it has one good feature to it.

Now what does v.19 mean? The word “must” indicates the necessary outcome of an evil course after it has been chosen. God lets the evil result of such a course become manifest but does so for purposes of His own, namely, that those approved of God as sound, true, and faithful may appear openly as such. “Approved” comes from a word used of testing precious metals in a fire to prove they are genuine. This division of the rich & poor was bad, but it did have one positive benefit: it revealed who is truly Christlike, and who is not. Perhaps there were some who saw what was happening, and saved some food for the poor who tended to arrive late. Perhaps there were some who invited some of the outcaste to sit at their table. Those who are Christlike in their consideration of others are the ones who are approved of God.

On the other hand, such situations will also reveal who are not approved of God. Many church people can *act* like Christians, but in certain situations, they show what they are really like on the inside. For example, many people can talk a good game, but under the pressure of adversity, they may utter profanity, hatred, & bitterness.

So there are 2 applications I want to make to this principle. First, have you faced certain situations where you revealed to yourself that you are not the Christian you thought you were? If so, God’s expects us to take the steps of repentance and spiritual growth. Secondly, in certain situations we see the true nature of people. When those situations reveal someone who is truly Christlike, then we should elevate such people to leadership in the church if they are willing. But sometimes situations will show that certain people should not be leaders in the church. Those who behave in a truly Christian manner will often stand out from those who do not.

Sources: C.K. Barrett, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968); Craig Blomberg, *The NIV Application Commentary: 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); Oliver B. Greene, *The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* (Greenville: The Gospel Hour, Inc., 1965); R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul’s First and Second Epistles to the Corinthians* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1937); John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 5 (Pasadena: Thru The Bible Radio, 1983); Paige Patterson, *The Troubled Triumphant Church: an Exposition of First Corinthians* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983); Larry Pierce, Online Bible [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Jerry Vines, *God Speaks Today: A Study of I Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Wise: I Corinthians* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1983). Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from The New King James Version (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).