

Discerning the Body of Christ -- The Lord's Supper: Window on the Church
1 Corinthians 11:17-34

God loves and looks after His own. Paul had warned renegade leaders at Corinth that God is very protective of His people, and anyone destroying a church would pay a price (1 Corinthians 3:16, 17). But other forces were taking their toll, including abuses of the Lord's Supper. Instead of holding a true "love feast" of shared food, the rich were banqueting while the poor were ignored. This is to despise the church (1 Corinthians 11:22), meaning there was little understanding of the church as a family which took care of its members. There are good reasons to love the church God loves and gave His Son to redeem.

❖ "Corinth, you have a problem!" vv. 17-22

"Your meetings are doing more harm than good because of the divisions in your church body, illustrated in your abuse of the Lord's people at His table."

❖ "Here's how to fix this. . ." vv. 23-34

"First, remember what Jesus said it was all about." (vv. 23-26)

The Lord's Table is a picture of unity and forgiveness in the New Covenant.

"Second, pay attention to what you are doing while you are there!" (vv. 27-32)

This abuse of the Lord's people brings both guilt and discipline.

"Third, wait for and accept one another unselfishly at this meal." (vv. 33, 34)

If we grasp the meaning of the Table, we will honor God by honoring His children.

Growth Principle #14 -- The spiritually mature Christian grasps the true nature of the Church as a diverse body of forgiven sinners serving one another in love.

1. What is my attitude towards the poor?

The Bible mentions "the poor" some 92 times. God is especially concerned with them: Psalm 113:5-8; 140:12. God's people, likewise, are to be compassionate to the poor. Deut. 15:7-11; Prov. 14:31; 21:13; 22:2; 28:27; Isaiah 3:14, 15. While we must be careful how we distribute our charity (Matt.

7:6; Philippians 1:9), and not enable laziness (2 Thess. 3:10), we must realize that there are those around us who are not as well off. Do we show the same respect to all our people? Rom. 12:16; James 2:1-9. Our love for Christ is no greater than our love for His people. Am I able to mix with all kinds of people in our church? Do I restrict my fellowship to those who look just like myself?

2. What is my attitude towards my church?

The Corinthians' behavior betrayed their true feelings about their church, which Paul says they were "despising" (v. 22). Our own attitudes are exposed by our behavior as we relate, or refuse to relate, to our church. The Lord's Supper is an invitation to a table surrounded by forgiven sinners who are to serve one another (Luke 22:23-30). There is no place for pride, aloofness, or distance between us. Do I see myself as a fellow-sinner? Do I view the church as a gathering of strangers or a family reunion? Am I participating in our church or merely attending services? Are the people in our church my friends, or just faces? Have I joined a church, and give to its ministries? Is church somewhere I go, or my extended family? Remember, our culture does not help us with this. In fact, our individualism, coupled with social media and digital communication, ironically, have brought more isolation, not cohesion, division, not unity, suspicion, not love. Church is to be an example to the world, a place where we love those who are different.

3. What is my attitude towards Jesus Christ?

For me, is it the LORD'S Supper, or just a ritual? Can I really celebrate His death for me because I know I am forgiven? Am I forgiving and loving others because He has forgiven and loved me? Do I look forward to His return?

Going Deeper--For Growth Groups:

1. How has our consumer culture mentality made inroads into churches? Why have we become church shoppers and church hoppers rather than church builders and supporters?

2. Social media are here to stay, but research shows they are making us less social! How do we use SM and Internet to unite us rather than merely inform us?

3. With nearly endless options, and our tendency to run from conflict rather than resolve it, how do we change our mind set to be servants of others rather than slaves of our own comfort?