

The Celebration of the Lord's Supper, Part 1

1 Corinthians 11:17-22

1846

First Corinthians chapter 11, and we come this morning to verses 17 to 34. First Corinthians 11:17 to 34. Now, this is a very critical part of the New Testament because it deals with the celebration of the Lord's Table. It concerns the Communion. Any of you who have been Christians for any period of time, or have been around the church for any period of time are aware of the significance that the church attaches to two particular rites: one is baptism and the other is the Lord's Table, or Communion. The reason we attach so much significance to these are that these things are two that the Lord has told us to do Himself. They are commanded ordinances of the church. Both of them were commanded and instituted and the example was set by our Lord Jesus Christ. We give a high priority to baptism and a high priority to the Lord's Table. In fact, I really feel so strongly about these two things as items of obedience, that I think a Christian should question his own commitment of obedience if he has not been obedient in these two areas.

Sometimes we struggle to know what God wants and to obey it, but this is one area where we don't even have to struggle because He says, "Be baptized and remember My death in the Lord's Supper." And I trust that we're doing that in our lives, not only when we come together to do it here, but in our Bible studies, our fellowship groups, in our homes with our families, with our friends in the groups that we share with and meet with. This is a vital part of Christian experience. It is not to be a missing ingredient; it is not to be ignored. It is not to be a tack-on at the end of a Sunday service, either. It is not to be a formal ritual. It is to be something that's woven into the life of a believer. And I would encourage you in this area.

Now, we're going to be encouraged, I think, as we look at verses 17 to 34 in this week and next week, for sure, and discuss what Paul has to say. Let me give you a little bit of a background so that you'll know where we are in terms of this passage. Studying 1 Corinthians, we've been studying the abuses that had arisen in the church at Corinth. In one of the abuses, one that they had really twisted and perverted grossly was the Lord's Table. They had turned the Lord's Table, believe it or not, into a gluttonous drunken feast. And that is the issue to which Paul writes in chapter 11 verses 17 to 34, the end of the chapter. He is very, very upset, uses very strong terms in correcting what they are doing. He says, in fact, it is so serious that God has moved into your congregation and taken the life of some of your members. Actually, they have been executed by God for what they had done at the Lord's Table. Very serious. Others, he says, are sick. Some are weak. And you better make sure you do something about it.

Now, because of the urgency of this, we need to understand something of the Lord's Supper. So, let's back up in history a little bit. On the night before His death, our Lord Jesus Christ gathered with His disciples in the upper room to eat the Passover meal. Historically, the Jews met at that particular period of history to eat the Passover. The Passover was a special meal designed by God to commemorate the deliverance of Israel out of Egypt. You'll remember that Israel was in bondage in

Egypt for over 400 years. God finally decided to deliver them and bring them to the land of Canaan which was to be their own land, the promised land. And He began to deliver them by a series of plagues which were designed to free Pharaoh's clutches and let them out. Finally, when the last plague came, which was the killing of the first born throughout the entire land of Egypt, Pharaoh said, "Take your people and get out." The only way the children of Israel could protect themselves from the death angel who would take the first born in every house was to kill a lamb, take the blood of the lamb, put it on the doorpost and the lintel, and then they ate the lamb along with some unleavened bread, et cetera, and some herbs as the Passover meal. So, they ate a meal and made a sacrifice to God. Put blood on the door and the angel passed over and that was the key to the deliverance of Israel from Egypt.

Whenever the Israelite, whenever the Jew want to go back and remember God as deliverer, God as Savior, God as a redeemer, he always remembered God who delivered them out of bondage in Egypt. And God instituted the Passover to be celebrated annually as a remembrance. And still it is today. The Jewish Passover. The Jew today is still remembering that as the point of contact with a saving God, which is tragic because they have to go right by the cross in the trip backwards which they totally miss.

But on that night before Jesus' death, while the disciples were eating the Passover meal, in the setting of that ancient feast held in remembrance of God's redemption of Israel from the slavery of Egypt, Jesus took that meal and transformed it into a new meal. He took a cup from the Passover meal. He took bread from the Passover meal and made a tremendous transition when He said, "This cup is My blood, this bread is My body and this is something new that you do in remembrance of Me." And now, when we look at the great redemptive point in history, we don't go to Egypt, we go to Calvary. We don't look back at the blood on the doorpost and the lintel; we go back to the blood shed at the cross. That is the point of contact with God's redeeming, saving power. And that's what Jesus was doing that night before His death. He was transforming the Passover into the Communion.

And for the Christian then, the Passover has no significance. It's interesting to study and to understand and so forth. But for us, the Lord's Table is the memorial that Christ Himself has instituted. And no longer do we look back to redemptive types in Egypt. We look back to the redemptive anti-type, the redemptive fulfillment that came in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ when He died on the cross and spilled His blood, cleansed us from our sin.

In Mark chapter 14 verse 22, we get a little insight into what our Lord was doing. Mark 14:22 says this, "And as they did eat," and what were they eating? They were eating the Passover meal in good Jewish tradition. "As they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave to them and said, take, eat, this is My body." Now, we've seen the fact that He doesn't mean this literally is His body but this is a symbol. "He took the cup, when He had given thanks, gave to them all and they all drank of it and He said, this is My blood of the new testament, the new covenant." This is a new day. This is a new dawning. We're not going back to the memorials and the old patterns and the old covenant, this is something new. This is the new covenant, the New Testament, it means the same thing. "Which is shed for many. Verily I say to you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine until the day that I drink it new with you in the Kingdom of God."

Now, this is recorded in Matthew, Mark, Luke, and it's alluded to in John 13. It's commented on by Paul in 1 Corinthians chapter 11. So, in all four gospels, there is reference made to that evening and the experience of the Last Supper in the upper room when Jesus took the Passover meal and

transformed it into the Communion. Now, this then became the normal celebration of the early church. Christ desiring that the cross become the focal point in instituting this supper thereby gave the church a way to continuously commemorate His death. And that is precisely what the early church did.

Acts chapter 2 will help us to see that. Notice verse 41 and 42 of Acts chapter 2. Acts 2:41, "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized," and this is in response to the message of Peter given on the Day of Pentecost. "The same day there were added," and they would be added to those who had already believed in Christ, "3,000 souls." Now, there is the birth of the church. "And they continued steadfastly in four areas," four ways in which the early church celebrated its life. One, the apostles' doctrine, that's teaching, theology, teaching that which the Apostles received as revelation from God. Fellowship, that's ministering, that's carrying out the duties and responsibilities that believers have within the framework of the Christian community. Breaking of bread. Now, I feel that that is going one step even beyond fellowship and includes the Lord's Supper. Because on the night in which Jesus was betrayed, He took bread and what? And broke it and said, and the breaking of the bread, I believe, has an implication of the Lord's Supper in it though it is broader in that, as I shall explain in a moment. And then, lastly, in prayers. Those are the four dimensions of the life of the early church: teaching, ministering, communing with the living Lord who had died for them, and praying.

Now, those things again are indicated in part in verse 46. They continued daily with one accord in the temple. And apparently that's where they gathered for teaching, or apostles' doctrine, very likely. And breaking bread from house to house, did eat their food with gladness and singleness of heart. And the idea there again is you have breaking of bread and fellowship and certainly prayer would be thrown in as well.

So, in the life of the church, notice, they continued every day breaking bread. I'm convinced, along with many other Bible scholars and historians of this period, that the early church celebrated the Lord's Table on a continual basis. In fact, it is not unlikely that they may have had Communion with every meal they ate, at the close of that meal. That is not an impossibility. That is, perhaps, a likelihood. The term "breaking of bread," actually in verse 42, has a historical meaning apart from the death of Christ. It is the term referring to the Palestinian custom of having a fellowship meal. It was common in those days for fellowship to revolve around a table. It still does. And it was common in that period of time to have folks over and to eat together.

Now, when we have somebody over for dinner, you know how it works. You get the food out on the table and it's all sitting there and everybody's kind of looking at each other waiting for the cue. You're trying to figure out whether they, you know, pray in this house, or whether they don't pray, or whether we all hold hands and sing the "Doxology," or whether we sit down, stand up, or what kicks this baby off, see. How do we get into this stuff? And the wife is in the kitchen, do they pray with the wife there or with the wife absent? I mean, what's the procedure. So, we sort of sit around until it all happens.

It was very apparent what the procedure was in this period of time. The host simply sat down, took a piece of bread, broke it and that, everybody dove in. That did it. So, the breaking of bread became synonymous with a fellowship meal. But beyond just that, it is apparent to most historians who analyzed the early church in the Book of Acts that incorporated right in this was the breaking of bread that Jesus did at the Communion. So, that when they had eaten the fellowship meal, they proceeded immediately following the fellowship meal to enter into the Lord's Communion, the Lord's Supper.

Now, we see this as we go through the Book of Acts. And eventually that fellowship meal became known as the love feast, became known as the agape, or some of you may have heard it pronounced agape. It was the love feast, the common meal, the sort of early church potluck that they ate and followed it with the Communion.

Now, it seems as though in the early days they were doing it every day. They were fellowshiping all over everywhere all the time. Now, remember this, that at the time when Peter preached at Pentecost, which was part of the great celebration of Passover as well, in that whole long period of feasting in Israel, many pilgrims had come to the city and were living with other Jewish families. This was part of the culture. When many of those pilgrims were saved, they didn't want to go back, so they stayed in the community. And when they stayed in the community, then the Christians had to take care of them. That's why it says in chapter 2 verse 44, they had all things in common and were selling their possessions and goods and giving them to the people that had need, because there were all these people who had come into the city whose needs had to be met. They had no livelihood. In addition, instantly at the point that the church began, slaves were saved. And there became a common brotherhood of the slave and the rich man. And the slaves' needs were then being met by rich men who could meet needs. And there was a beautiful commonness. They ate in different houses. They began to mingle their lives. And part of this was the celebration of the breaking of bread, commemorating the Communion of our Lord.

We see this thing develop even further if we go in the Book of Acts. For example, and we could look at several different things, but chapter 20 verse 7. Paul came to a city of Troas and on the first day of the week when the disciples came together to break bread. It appears by this time that it's sort of settled down to a once a week thing and they were then breaking bread once a week. "Now, John," you say, "what does it mean to break bread here?" Well, I think the issue here again is the breaking of bread as a commemoration of the Lord's Supper, or the death of Christ, as it was the remembrance aspect. But in addition to that remembrance, verse 11 says, "When he therefore was come again and had broken bread and eaten and talked a long while," the implication of that verse is that they also were still eating, that there was still a common meal.

Now, back up again to verse 7 and you'll find that Paul preached to them. Now, this became a pattern in the early church. The church came together the first day of the week. They had a fellowship meal, followed by Communion, followed by a sermon. Now, that became pretty much the pattern. And as time progressed it stayed with us. And, in fact, even today there are many churches that meet together on every Lord's Day, have the breaking of bread followed by a sermon. The love feast long ago faded away. The love feast was not something instituted by our Lord. It was not something instituted by the apostles. It was something that was a holdover from the culture. And so, it never really stuck. The early custom, to connect the Lord's Supper to the ordinary meal of every day, began to fade away a little bit. They didn't do it with every meal, then they did it with the common meal once a week, and even that began to fade.

You say, "Well, why did they have that attachment?" Well, I think there's several reasons that the early church attached Communion to a common meal. One is because the Lord Jesus had attached Communion to the Passover meal and that became sort of a norm. The Lord Jesus had eaten a meal with His disciples and then instituted the Lord's Table and so they kind of said that must be the pattern.

In addition to that, the Jewish people had always associated the Passover, of course, as that meal. And the Jewish Christian would make that connection easily. But the Gentile Christian would look back at his heritage and he would say, "Hey, whenever we go to the temple and whenever we offer anything to our god, we also have a meal." There were many festivals. In fact, they used to hold what they called *eranos* which were common meals, a sort of a potluck sharing among the Gentiles which would be followed by the worship of some god. And so, this was a cultural thing both in the Jewish and Gentile culture. And the early church didn't depart from it. They came together for a common meal which has been known as the love feast or the *agapē*, and it was followed by the Lord's Supper.

But let me hasten to add. None of these things is particularly prescribed in Scripture. You could have the Lord's Table after any meal you wanted in your home and fit the biblical pattern. Or you could have the Lord's Table, and a love feast if you so chose to do that, could follow a special meal where you've called certain folks together for that intent and purpose. Or you can have it within the church without the love feast, whatever. The point is that you do it. The point is that you obey what the Lord says and that you exercise the wonderful privilege and opportunity of fellowshiping around the cross. I daresay I think some families could be dramatically altered if they spent a little time doing this.

Now, in Corinth, and I think Corinth is one illustration of a group of people who've contributed to the death of the love feast. In Corinth they had come together on this basis, they had a full-blown dinner first and then the Lord's Supper, but they had absolutely made it into a disaster. They had obliterated any meaning out of it. In fact, they had turned it into what they were used to in their idol feasts. It became a drunken, gluttonous, selfish exercise. And then, when they followed it up with the Lord's Table, it made God sick. It made Him so sick and so upset that He decided that the only way He could deal with it was to make some of the Corinthians sick and He made them sick and some of them so sick they died. God was very upset. When they came to the Lord's Table, they came with such a desecrated and corrupted spirit that it became a mockery and a blasphemy against the cross. And God would not tolerate it.

In fact, we find that the rich people would bring the food. It was supposed to be potluck and it was supposed to be a common meal where there was a symbolic kind of sharing of food which symbolized the sharing of everything in the Christian community, and believe me, it should have been that way. Christianity broke down fantastic barriers and now they were starting to put them back up again only 20 years after Jesus has gone. But they would come together, and the rich people would run and get there real early and eat all their food before the poor had arrived. And then, the poor would come and say, "Oh, so sorry, it's all gone." Some people were turning into gluttons and others were going home hungry.

In fact, if you were to look at the 1 Corinthians chapter 11, I think it's verse 33, you would see by the admonition of Paul this is precisely what happens. "Wherefore, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another." You can't have a potluck until you wait for somebody to come and share your meal. If you've got a hunger problem, he says in 34, if all you want to do is stuff your face, stay home. That isn't the point. You certainly don't need to do it there. You certainly can't say, "Well, I was just hungry." Baloney. If you're hungry, go home. You come here to share.

So, you have in Corinth the rich people and the poor people, those who could bring plenty and those who could bring hardly anything. And it seems apparent to some that the slave might enjoy only one

good meal a week and that would be the meal of the love feast. But it wasn't going right. The rich didn't share with the poor. They ate in exclusive little groups. They hurried so there wouldn't be anything left when the poor came, and the result was that the social occasion that was supposed to obliterate the differences wound up building huge walls between people. And then, when they would go into the Lord's Table, they would go into the Lord's Table and it would be desecrating, it would be blasphemous. It would be a mocking to celebrate the commonness of the cross while they were, you know, doing everything they could to put up walls between themselves and others whom God equally loved.

So, Paul writes this section to correct their abuses. And he really comes at them. Let's look at verse 17 as a basic introduction to this section. And we're not going to finish so we'll just take a little of it here. "Now, in this that I declare to you, I praise you not." Now, in chapter 11 verse 2 he had a few things he could praise them for. He praised them because they at least asked him questions and they had maintained doctrinal tradition. But here he says I can't praise you about this, "That you come together not for the better but for the worse."

You know, going to church for you guys is the worst thing you can do. Think about that. I mean, that's amazing. He says, "Look, I declare to you," and he uses the word *paraggellō*, which means command. "I'm not making suggestions anymore. I'm laying it out, folks. Now, I have a few things to command you and I'm not going to praise you in any of them. So, let's forget about that stuff. When you come together, you come together not for the better but for the worse. You'd be better off if you stayed home than if you come together." Boy, that's really something. Instead of your worship being helpful and edifying, it's destructive. Better stay home.

You hate to think about that, but I am sure that's probably true in churches, maybe some churches that you even know of, it would be better off if nobody came, far better. Because either they don't hear the truth there or they get there and it's just, you get caught in a crossfire between the people and the guy in the pulpit. Or, there's wrangling, and fighting, and hassling and all it does when you go to church is activate your antagonism. Have you ever been in a situation like that? You just start seeing all the people you don't agree with. Really not a good experience at all.

Well, in the Corinthian assembly, the worse thing they could possibly do for their spiritual life was come together. You say it's incredible in the light of Hebrews 10. Yes, "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together." You need to do that, he says, to provoke one another to love and good works. But all they did was provoke each other to anger, selfishness. Imagine when it comes to the place in the church where the church comes together for the worse, you're in real trouble. They had degraded the love feast into a selfish, gluttonous, drunken exercise in indulgence, and slapped the Lord's Supper on the end of it. The poor brothers were wounded. They had turned the Lord's Supper into a feast for satisfying hunger. The elements of Communion were handled irreverently. And Paul says, I'm going to straighten this thing out. So, verse 17 is a general rebuke.

I would also include this for your thinking. Verse 17 also introduces a rebuke that will begin in chapter 12 through 14 on the misuse of spiritual gifts, which we'll get into as soon as we finish this section. So, these are the things that he is rebuking in their assembly: the misuse of the Communion and the misuse of the spiritual gifts. But for this time, it's the Communion that's on his mind. Now, you have an outline there with three points and we'll just look at one of them this morning and cover the next two next time.

First, Paul discusses the perversion of the Lord's Supper. And I've kind of set the scene for you a little bit. In verses 18 to 22, the perversion of the Lord's Supper, verse 18, "For first of all, when ye come together in the church," and the word church, *ekklesia* is never used in the New Testament in reference to a building, never. It is always used in reference to an assembly of people, whether they're living, dead, universal or local, it's always people. Church is an organism. So, when you come together in the church, when you assemble as believers, "I keep on hearing again and again, is the Greek, that there are *schismata* among you and I partly believe it."

Now, *schismata* is an interesting term. It refers basically to a difference of opinion. I want you to understand the word here because I think we're seeing another dimension in the messed up life of the Corinthian church. It refers basically to a difference of opinion. For example, in John 7:43 and John 9:16, John says about Jesus, "There was a division among the people." And what it means in those two instances is that some people said Jesus was of God, and some people said Jesus was not of God and John's comment is there was a division, a *schismata* among the people. What he means by that is there was a difference of opinion. It is a difference of opinion about a certain thing.

So, he says when you come together, I continually hear there are differences of opinion among you. When the church comes together, instead of uniting and fellowshiping, all you do is argue, argue. Now, this adds another dimension to their already messed up church. They had already split the church on at least two other accounts. The rich and the poor had drawn a big line between them and they were totally alienating each other. So, they were split on that basis, the sociological split. They were split theologically, "I am of Paul. I am of Apollos. I am of Cephas. I am of Christ." Everybody has his little clique. Read it in chapter 1 and chapter 3. They had their own little theological group and the amazing part of it was that the different groups didn't even disagree theologically; they just isolated around personalities.

And so, here there were personality cults, segmenting everybody. There was a split sociologically between the rich and the poor. And now, here we find that in just the every week, week in, week out discussion and inner action of the life of the church, there was a constant wrangling about differences of opinions about everything.

Now, that's really sad, and that's why at the very outset of the book in 1 Corinthians 1:10, Paul says, "I beseech you, brothers, by the name of the Lord Jesus Christ that you all speak the same thing and that there be no more of these differences of opinion, but that you perfectly join yourselves together with the same mind and the same judgment." You ought to have the same understanding, the same opinion, the same attitude, and speak the same thing. Instead, you come together and fight over everything.

You say, "What ever causes the church to fight like that? What causes the church to split into little factions?" I'll tell you what causes it: Paul gave it to you as expressly as you'll ever hear it. "I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual but as unto," what? "Carnal. Are you not carnal? For whereas among you there are divisions and strife and so forth and envy. Are you not carnal?" What causes it is carnality, walking in the flesh and doing what the mind says instead of walking in the Spirit and doing what God says, causes division.

The most feared thing in the church in my mind is division. That's true in Paul's mind. And they had it every way you could slice it. The not just the cliques of chapter 1 and 3, not just the rich-poor dichotomy sociologically, but they had little groups dividing and alienating over all kinds of opinions.

There was just a spirit of divisiveness pervading everything, and the problem of this unity was like a raging forest fire in the Corinthian assembly. And it came to the Lord's Table and as they sat down to try to have a common meal, as they sat down to try to commune about a common life, it just was so obvious that they were fractured that it made a mockery out of the whole thing. And Paul says, I partly believe it. How come you only partly believe it? Because I've heard it so many times I'm sure there's some exaggeration and I want you to know that I'm not totally credulous.

Now, he goes further in verse 19. And this is really an interesting statement. He says, "I believe it for this reason, I believe it because there must be also heresies among you that they who are approved may be made manifest among you." Boy, that is a strange statement, folks. Did you hear what he said? He says the reason I believe you've got division is because there must be division among you so that the ones who are approved might be made manifest. You say, "Is he saying that the church has to have heresy?" Yes. What does the word "heresy" mean? I'm glad you asked because that's very important. The word "heresy" doesn't mean totally what we've made it mean today. The word "heresy" basically means, it comes from a root that stresses the idea of a choice, choosing. It simply means a choice of a group who hold a given opinion. I'll tell you how you'll understand it. It's translated again and again in the gospels by the word "sect." It's a group of people who hold an opinion. It doesn't have to be bad. It doesn't mean that it's good. It's used in a neutral sense in, say, Acts 24. It talks about the sect of the Nazarenes. It isn't necessarily bad. It's used in a bad sense in Galatians 5:20 where it refers to one of the works of the flesh, is *hairesis*, or heresies, or what it means is differences of opinion. And there it has to do with the selfish contention, has to do with a self-centered factious clique kind of thing, and that's its use here.

There has to be contention, if you will. Or there has to be factions in the church. There has to be problems in the church. There has to be differences of opinions in the church. You say, "Well, why? I mean, you just said in 1:10 get rid of them all, now you're saying they've got to be there. Are you saying you're looking for some people who would take on the ministry of splitting things? If you are, well, I have several names to suggest who are already developing well along that very line. Well, what's he saying here?" No, he's saying it has to be that they who are approved might be manifest among you.

Now, wait a minute. Paul says I believe there are those groups because they're necessary. Now, notice the statement, "there must be." That's *dei*. D-E-I in the Greek. It is a word that means it is necessary. "It is necessary", and then you should translate the word factions, that's how it should be. It is necessary that there be factions among you. That little word "it is necessary" is used again and again in the new Testament. A very common particle; very, very, very useful. And in many of its uses, it singles out something that is necessary because of the will of God. It is used of something that is necessary because of the will of God. For example, it is necessary that Jesus suffer and, right, and die and rise again. It is necessary that I go to Jerusalem. You find that little particle again and again and again connected with something that Jesus must do because that is God's will.

And here we have the same thing. It is necessary. Why? Because God is doing something that needs it. What's He doing? He is approving certain people and making them manifest to you. How? Because when problems arrive and when factions arrive you will soon find out who the good folks are, the *dokimoi*: the approved, the tested, the gold who come out of the fire purified. Evil is necessary to manifest good.

You don't know who the peacemakers are in your church unless you need somebody to make the peace, right? You don't know who the people are who show the love in the church unless you know how they've been related to the people who don't show it. You see, it's adversity and struggle and contention that causes the true leadership, the true godly people, the true walking in the Spirit folks to rise to the top and be visible to everybody. Trouble has a way of manifesting personality and it has a way also of manifesting spirituality. The *dokimoi* are the ones that hang in there and give evidence of walking in the Spirit in the midst of a difficult situation.

For example, in 1 Thessalonians 2:4 it tells us something about these *dokimoi*, that's a Greek word for tested or proved, approved. It says as we were the *dokimoi* literally of God, that's the idea if not the translation, as we were the *dokimoi* of God, the approved, the tested, the proven of God to be put in trust with the gospel. Now, listen, Paul says here's something about the approved: they are the ones with whom Christ entrusts the ministry. One of the things that in the church we do as elders and leaders is look for people to whom we need to give ministries. We need a person here or a person there, or we want to see who God is really moving on in order that they might have a ministry for the Lord. We want to see who it is that God is really touching. And so, it is very important that such a person, before they be given a ministry, be approved. And one of the very obvious ways that approved people rise to the top and become visible is how they respond to difficulty within the body of Christ. How they handle adversity, how they handle problems, how they handle struggles, how they handle disagreements. This has a way of manifesting to the body the *dokimoi*, the approved. And they are the ones suited for special service.

And I really believe, people, with all my heart that some of the reason that some people wash out of effective ministries for Christ and even out of pastoring ministries and mission field ministries is because when they stand the test of struggle, when they stand the test of disagreement, they can't handle it in the Spirit, and consequently they never reach the place where God will entrust to them the gospel. So, the approved are made manifest in difficulty. It's in struggle that the gold comes through the fire, see. And so, God says in the church, you're going to have it, because that's one way you'll see who can lead and who can minister.

I think Paul even in his own life understood this as a gracious thing on God's part, not as something that he was so worthy of, but that God had approved him by His grace. In James 1, I think it interesting, that James 1:12 says, "Blessed is the man that endures temptation for when he is *dokimoi*, really." Another way that you see the approved man, he is the guy who goes through temptation and comes out victorious. You look around and say, "Now, who are the approved saints?" They're the ones who handle the struggle, and they're the ones who endure the temptation, and they're the ones who shall receive when they are tried a crown of life whom the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give. Now, you see that these are the *dokimoi*.

I would add further that the *dokimoi* are the true Christians, the wheat among the tares. First John 2:19 talks about, "They went out from us because they were not of us, and they went out that it might be made manifest they were not of us." Trouble had driven some people out. And consequently the folks said, "Oh, those are the tares, this is the wheat."

I remember when I first came to Grace Church; one of the first things we ever encountered was a very troublesome situation. And over this whole troublesome situation, two families left the church and these two, we've had, you know, trouble along the way all the time. But this particular case that I remember, the two families that left the church, it was manifest immediately after that that they were

not Christians at all. They were not *dokimoi* in the simplest sense. They weren't even saved. And the struggle there made that manifest to us, and it was a purifying thing. And it is true that the church in process of purification is going to have factions, it's going to have temptation in order that the approved might rise to the top, so that it might be obvious to all of us who the leadership is, who the people are who have proven themselves spiritually capable and spiritually responsible.

It says in Titus 3:10, if you find somebody who is factious, give him an admonition, give him another admonition. If he doesn't listen to those two, put him out for the purity of the church. The purity of the church is at stake. So, he says factions and sins are going to come into the church, might as well get ready for them, it's going to happen. You say, "Well, now I've seen my ministry. I'm going to do that. I'm just going to go around trying to help leaders develop and create a lot of problems. I mean, as long as it's got to be there, I'm willing to make the sacrifice."

Well, I just want to hasten to say something to you that may help you along that line. I just wouldn't want you to do that without really thinking it through a little bit. And the reason I say that is because you could get yourself in a little bit of trouble, because in Matthew it says this in chapter 18 verse 7, just listen to this: it says, "Woe," and that means trouble, "trouble to the world because of offenses." Now, listen, "For it is necessary that offenses come but woe to that man by whom the offense comes." Do you get that? You say, "I think I got it." Well, listen again in Luke 17 then you'll know for sure. Luke 17:1, "He said to His disciples, 'It is impossible for that offenses will come.'" Guys, you've got to get ready, trouble. "But woe to him through whom they come, it would be better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and he was cast into the sea." You hear that? Now, that may hasten the end of your ministry in that area.

It's going to happen; just don't you be the one that makes it happen. The church is not to be the place where you stir up the trouble. You let the Lord do that. In the perfecting of the saints, we teach the Word; the Holy Spirit brings the trials. Okay, you let Him worry about how that's going to happen.

Now, he says, your action has so corrupted everything, your factions and arguments and differences of opinion and sociological, theological haggling has created such a monstrosity that he says in verse 20, "Listen, when you come together therefore into one place, it is impossible for you to eat the Lord's Supper." Now, *ouk estin* with an infinitive in the Greek is translated "it is impossible." You might think that's the Lord's Supper; I've got news for you, that is not the Lord's Supper you're eating. You may be drinking a cup and saying some words and you may be eating a piece of bread and saying some words, but that is not the Lord's Supper.

It's impossible to have the Lord's Supper when you have hearts like you have. Can't be done. Because, verse 21, "In eating everyone takes before the other his own supper." Well, what kind of a potluck is that where you go and sit in a corner and eat your own food? Selfish. "And one is hungry." The poor man, he can't get anything, "and another is drunk." You have extremes there. The rich are drunk and the poor have nothing and you call this the love feast? You call this the Lord's Supper? You say this is communing, and then you enter into the Communion in that kind of a situation, hating each other, fighting each other, antagonizing each other? How can you celebrate the common unity of the saints? How can you do what he says in 10:16? How can this be communion with the blood? Communion with the body? How can you be that one bread and one body of verse 17? How can you celebrate that you're a one bread family? You've destroyed it. There's no room for that.

And then, Paul in just a frustration, as if he were groping for a reason why they're doing it says in

verse 22, "What, what am I to think? What is the answer? Is it because you don't have a house to eat and drink in?" I mean, do you roam the streets and the only place you can go to eat is here so you've got to come here and stuff your face? Is that it? You don't have a home if you're hungry that you can go home to and eat or drink? You've got to turn the fellowship meal into a gluttony and drunkenness exercise because you don't have a house you can eat and drink in, is that it? Or maybe it isn't that you don't have a house; maybe it's that you despise the church of God. Maybe your problem is you hate the church and you just as soon destroy it. Maybe your desire is to take the thing which Jesus has bought with His precious blood and wreck it. Is that what you want to do?

And, boy, I always think of this whenever I think of somebody who tries to do something divisive in the church. Oh, is it because you hate the church that you're doing this? Is this your way of saying, "Lord, I just want you to know that since You built the church, I'm going to take the liberty to wreck it." Is that why you're doing this? When you sow seeds of discord or disunity, Paul says: is that what you have in mind? Or maybe this, maybe you just want to shame poor people. Maybe you just get glee out of putting your heel on somebody's neck who doesn't have anything. Maybe that's why you're behaving like you are. You either don't have a house, or you hate God, or you hate people. What am I going to say to you? He says. "Shall I praise you? I praise you not." No praise for you.

The church is one place where, maybe the only place, where rich and poor ought to be able to commune together, where rich and poor ought to love each other. Jesus made this clear. The apostles made it clear. It became the pattern for the new church as they shared all things in common. In Galatians 2:10 Paul says, "Hey, don't forget the poor." The church is one place where the barriers ought to be broken down. And you know, in the ancient world they were rigid. I mean, there were free men, and slaves, and men and women, and Greek and barbarians, and people who spoke Greek and people who didn't, and educated and uneducated and Jews and Gentiles, and rich and poor, and Romans and non-Romans, and cultured and uncultured, and all of these barriers. And the church came together and just shattered them all. The walls were broken down, Ephesians 2 says. And then, 20 years later they're building them all over again, putting them all back up.

You say, "But John, what does this say to me?" I think it says a lot of things. Number one, it says you better come to the Lord's Table. And secondly, it says you better be careful how you deal with the church and you better be sure that you don't do anything to divide the church. And I'll tell you, when you come to the Lord's Supper, or when you come to the fellowship of saints that meets here, I hope you don't come with any racist feelings, because in Christ there aren't any. I hope you don't come with any sexist feelings, or classist feelings, or selfish, uncaring feelings. Because if you do, you pervert this fellowship and you pervert the Lord's Table just like the Corinthian church did. And what am I going to say to you? I'll say to you what Paul said, "I praise you not."

We come together for fellowship, beloved. We come together to worship God. We come together to celebrate our unity. Let it be pure. Let it be real. And you let the Holy Spirit in His providence allow the factions to come for the purifying of the church, don't you start them. I trust that our church would not be like the Corinthian church, but that our church would be like the Thessalonian church of whom Paul said this, "We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of God and our Father." And further he said this, and this is beautiful, "And as touching brotherly love, you need not that I write unto you, for you yourselves are taught of God to love one another."

Our Father, we do thank You this morning for the clear word we've heard, for the high calling that You've given us. We see how the Corinthians have perverted everything. And, Father, that is the thing that we desire to avoid. Teach us how to make peace. Teach us how to bring unity. Give us the desire above all to be obedient to You. Save us from our selfishness. Don't let us be divided into theological cliques, sociological cliques, or cliques built around the opinions that come and go with every passing of business and activity. Preserve within us the beauty of that oneness that the choir sang when they began our fellowship this morning, that bond that binds us together. Deepen our love for each other so that we sacrifice to meet the needs that each has. And we'll thank You in Christ's name, amen.

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