

I've given today's message the title, "The Body, and the Body and the Blood".

Taking Communion together (The Lord's Supper; Some people call it "the Eucharist" ...), is a very serious and solemn event... We don't joke around; We don't take it lightly, because it is at this table, where we remember the brutal execution of our Lord Jesus.... We remember His sacrifice: His suffering; His dying; And of course we also remember, the joy of His resurrection....

Paul tells us, that every time we share together in Communion, we **proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.**

And because **we** have the benefit of Paul's teaching in 1 Corinthians, we know that Communion is this solemn event, and we might find ourselves wondering "What on Earth, was that Corinthian church thinking – in the way **they** behaved in communion..."

They held it as a meal (well that's fair enough – it's good to hold Communion as a meal)...

But it seems that their communion was like a BYO church dinner... (Only they didn't **wait** for each other, and they didn't **share** with each other)... It seems there was a bit of a division between the rich and the poor – the haves and the have-nots... And the rich would arrive a bit earlier with their ample supplies of bread and wine and whatever else they were going to eat... And they'd 'tuck in', and have a binge, and get drunk... And by the time the poorer people got there (the ones who had nothing), that's what they were left with – nothing...

What a broken church??? It was so broken, Paul said “You’re worse off for coming together”... What he’s saying is: Your worship services do more harm than good.

Woah!!!! What a dreadful indictment on a church...

“When you come together, it is not for the better, but for the worse”....

Now, think about that: “How could “Coming together to worship God”, **possibly** be worse than “**Not** coming together to worship God”????” ... It’s when a church comes together, but they don’t come together – It’s where they come divided....

It causes **more harm**, for a church to come together divided, than to not come together at all.

Now, we’re not talking minor divisions here – we’re talking major stuff...

To an extent, there will always be some kind of divisions within the church. Paul says:

I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part,¹⁹ for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognised.

Now what he's doing here, is drawing a distinction... It's a distinction between what he calls "divisions" and what he calls "factions"... A division, is a major split. In the Greek it's σχίσματα (schismata), from which we get our word "schism", which is used to describe a split in a church... But the distinction that Paul is making here, is this split – this schism, is not doctrinal in nature – they're not splitting because they disagree on the Scriptures, or disagree on their theology... – it's personal, or social... Examples of this kind of split, might "the rich being split from the poor", or one strata of society being split from another strata of society... Or it may be one family grouping being split from another family grouping.... Or the blacks being split from the whites; Or the Jew from the Gentile.. Or wage-earners from business-owners...

But the point is, it's not a doctrinal split – it's simply a broken people, not being, what the church is meant to be... And there's no justification for this – ever... The Christian church, is the body of Christ – we are a reconciling community... We've received love and forgiveness **from** God, to reconcile us **to** God... And therefore, as God's children, **we** demonstrate that same love and forgiveness to others – to our brothers and sisters in Christ – to be reconciled to each other...

Alright, so he's heard that there are divisions – splits, along social or personal lines... And this should not be so within a church...

Whereas "factions" (in the Greek) αἵρεσις (haireseis), from which we get our word "heretic".... It's about choosing to follow a certain teaching, or a certain doctrine... Factions are

drawn up along “party lines” (if you like)... So, in the New Testament, we have “the party of the Pharisees”, “the party of the Sadducees”, “the sect of the Christians”ⁱ It’s a choice – it’s a decision we make, to hold to a certain teaching...

And Paul says: **19** there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognised.

Now, what’s that telling us? It’s telling us that if some of them **are** genuine, then some are **not** genuine.

Jesus warned us that false teachers would come into the church, and many would be led astray by them.... If those who were genuine, did not stand against those who were false, then how could anyone tell the difference between the true Gospel, and the lies that are taught, to lead many astray??? And so, he’s saying “there must be factions”.

In every age, false teachers bring heresies into the church, to lead people astray... But also in every age, God will provide His faithful teachers, who faithfully proclaim the Gospel... And thus, there’s factions – it’s normal in the church...

So, if there are factions – if people choose to follow different teachings within the church, how do **we** know which teaching to follow? Paul said “there needs to be factions, so that those: **who are genuine among you may be recognised...** How do we recognise a genuine teacher, as opposed to a false teacher?

Well, he doesn't really go into that here, but let me just leave you with 2 ways:

- Content of the teaching; and
- Content of the character...

When it comes to content of the teaching, those who are genuine, allow the Scriptures to shape what they believe, rather than letting “what they believe”, to over-ride the Scriptures...

And when it comes to character, if they're living by the Spirit, the fruit of the Spirit, will be very evident in their lives. They'll be people characterised by: Love; Joy; Peace; Patience; Kindness; Goodness; Faithfulness; Gentleness; and Self-control...

Alright, those who are genuine, will be recognised by the content of what they believe, and the content of their character...

And so factions, (choosing to follow a particular teaching), is inevitable within a church – it's just up to us, to make sure that we are genuine in **our** faith,,, but it's also so that we recognise those who are not genuine...”

Anyway, in other parts of this letter, and certainly in some of his other writings, the Apostle Paul gives much more teaching on what it means to follow the genuine gospel...

But here, he's not so much concerned with what he calls “factions”, as he is with what he calls, “divisions”.

Righto: So, the presenting issue was the way this Corinthian church behaved in communion... But it seems pretty obvious, this was just a symptom of the **real** problem in that church. The **real** problem was individualism. It was their lack of connection – their lack of unity – their **independence** from one another – It was their failure to identify as the body...

When I was at Bible College, the first thing they taught us, when it comes to interpreting Scripture:

- wasn't how to compare the Greek with the English;
- It wasn't how to know and apply the historical context;
- It wasn't to place the Scriptures in a wider theological framework...

Do you know the first thing they taught us? – It's something we can all do, and **should** all do.... – It's to read the verses we're studying, in the context of the verses around it... When you're studying a passage of Scripture, read a chapter or 2 beforehand. Read a chapter or 2 following... And it's amazing how much the Bible will open up to us, when we do that....

Chapter 11, is an object lesson, beginning with communion... He begins with the bread and the wine – the body and the blood of Jesus, but what the object lesson is really about, is us as disciples, **being** the body of Christ. The body of Jesus was broken for us, so that **we as the body of Christ, shall be one!!!.**

Immediately following today's reading, it goes straight into Chapter 12, and do you know what Chapter 12 is all about??? It has some of the most magnificent teaching, on what it means for the church, to be "the body of Christ"... Each member, depending on the other; Not one part of the body, is independent from another part of the body. We all need one another, and depend on one another. It's about the unity of the body.

In V22, he sets the context: The context is, about those who despise the church of God; It's about those who humiliate others in the church...

V22 sets the scene, and then he teaches us what communion is about:

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.**"

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.**"

²⁶ For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

Solemn stuff hey....

v27 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.

Practices of how we do communion, vary from church to church, and from family to family... We know this verse well: If we take communion in an unworthy manner, we will be guilty concerning the body and the blood of the Lord...

For this reason, many parents won't allow their children to take communion until they're a bit older, and old enough to understand, that they need to be respectful, and honour God, in the way they take communion...

And so we're told to examine ourselves, before we eat the bread and the wine... I'm not told to judge the person across the aisle, and whether **they're** worthy to take communion or not – I am to judge **myself**.

How am I to judge myself???

- Am I holding the bread right?
- Did I dip the bread in the wine far enough? Or did I do it too far? (by the way, if your fingernails get down to the wine, you've probably dipped too deep)
- Do I eat it straight away? Or do I hold on to it, until everybody's been served, and we eat together????

Look, all that's just practical stuff, and I don't think it really matters much at all...

Usually, before we take communion, we like to have a prayer of confession, so we can get ourselves right with God before we take communion... But you know what??? It is impossible to be right with God, if we're **not** right with our Brother or Sister in Christ...

V29: ²⁹ For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.

What body is he talking about here??? Is he talking about discerning that the bread represents the body of Christ???? If so, then it's all about knowledge.... In my mind, through the bread and the wine, I know that I'm meeting with Christ??? Is that what he's talking about???

Well "Yes", but he's also talking about something much greater and much more practical... ²⁹ anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.

What body is he talking about??? As we get into chapter 12, there's no debate: Paul is talking about the body of Christ. **We**, are the body of Christ. **The church** is the body of Christ...

And if my relationship with the body (with the church [as the body of Christ]) is one of brokenness; schism; split,,, woe to me.... I'm bringing judgment on myself...

We live in a very individualistic culture, where we see “being saved”, primarily as “my relationship with God”.... But at communion, we come face to face with the reality, that as children of God, we are all part of the body of Christ....

And it is so important, that we examine ourselves – not just to get right with God, but we examine ourselves, to ensure that we love our brother; that we are reconciled to our sister; that we discern the body of Christ, and that we are in right relationship with the body of Christ...

And this doesn’t only go for communion.... It’s to do with our very salvation... It’s to do with every-day worship.

In Matthew 5, Jesus said:

21 "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not murder; and whoever murders will be liable to judgment.' 22 But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire. 23 So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, 24 leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

This is serious stuff...

30 That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.

It's not because we hold the bread the wrong way – this is about “Division” – It’s about personal and social divides, and the pride that prevents us from truly examining ourselves, and repenting of bitterness, or resentment, or whatever it is, that divides us from others in the church... **Division (schism)**, can be the cause, of weakness, sickness, and even death....

This is serious stuff...

It's not so much about doing communion according to the book, and getting all the ques right (and dotting all the “I’s” and crossing all the “T’s” – It’s about having the right attitude toward our brothers and sisters in Christ....

And this isn’t merely a spiritual thing – it’s a very practical thing... When, from our hearts, we forgive, and **seek** forgiveness – when we open our eyes, to those around us, and we realise that we together, are the body of Christ, and it’s **not** just about “me and God” – but that my destiny and salvation, is tied to the body... And when our primary concern shifts, from an individualised faith (where it’s just all about “me” and “God”), to being a united body of Christ – a body where I depend on them, and they depend on me – a body where I share my deepest needs, and I pray for their deepest needs... When we’ve examined ourselves, and are reconciled, then we’ve correctly discerned the body of Christ.

When we truly examine ourselves, and rightly connect with the body, when we come together, it will not be for judgment, but for the glory of God.

¹ 19. He accepts the inevitability of *differences* (*haireseis*). The word has to do with choosing and means those who have chosen in the same way, e.g. the Sadducees (Acts 5:17), the Pharisees (Acts 15:5), and the Christians (Acts 24:5, 14). (in Morris, L., 1985. *1 Corinthians: an introduction and commentary*, Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.)