

Title: When Church is Dangerous
Text: 1 Cor. 11.17-22
Theme: What you do reveals what you are.
Series: 1 Cor. #48
Prop Stmt.

Every city develops a reputation. When you identify yourself as being from that city you know that people will have a tendency to view you in light of that reputation. So, if you are a student who goes away to college or you are on vacation somewhere and you are asked where you are from; you can say, "I am from Detroit" and expect a little bit of a reaction. Honestly, it's sort of fun isn't it? Detroit has a bit of a reputation. But, we can think of many urban centers in the world that have a particular reputation, yet, within those cities there were churches that over time developed a rock-solid testimony for the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The ancient city of Corinth, located about 35-40 miles west of Athens, was famous for its moral laxity and intellectual pride. Whatever happened in Corinth, stayed in Corinth – sort of attitude. But the church was not a towering contrast and testimony to the gospel of Christ. Systemic snobbishness, factionalism, moral failure, insensitivity to one another, doctrinal looseness, along with arrogant and misguided emotionalism produced a colossal mess that called itself a church. And frankly, while it was a church, it was a church in serious disorder and in danger of completely imploding.

This is not what you would expect from a church that had been started by the apostle Paul is it? If we had the opportunity to be part of a fellowship of believers that had been started by the apostle Paul, we would expect better. The mess that called itself the church at Corinth was not what Paul had hoped for either. In fact, it becomes obvious that not every situation is an accurate reflection of its leadership. Paul cared about these people way more than they cared about him, the gospel or Christ. Fundamentally, many of these people cared primarily for themselves. They frankly worshipped themselves and called it church.

The text that we are focusing on today, is dealing with what we call the Lord's Supper, or the Lord's Table, or as many call it – Communion. When the church in Corinth gathered to observe, remember and celebrate this ordinance, it was a disaster. They did not think of it as a disaster, but God did. The wording in v.17 is very, very pointed. Perhaps you have heard people say, "Well at least we went to church." Here Paul is saying, it would be better if you did not even meet!

Let's back up for just a minute. Chapter 11 opens with a statement in v.2 that stands in quite a contrast to v.17. In v.2 Paul is pointing out that there are some things that they are doing that reflect that some of them are still remembering and holding on to some of the things that he taught. This is how Paul opens this entire section of the book that is dealing with the life of the church as it gathers for worship. There are a number of obvious issues that he addresses (gender, order, Lord's table, spiritual gifts), but underneath all of these surface issues is this prevailing attitude that is killing the people

and killing the church. This attitude is the one that thinks that church is the place where I can show off my self or get for myself. The church at Corinth was the original Myspace.com. That is why Paul deals with the whole issue of gender distinction and appropriate appearance. If you are a man, look like a man, dress like a man, live like a man for the glory of God. If you are a woman, look like a woman, dress like a woman, live like a woman for the glory of God. Men are not better than women, women are not better than men. Neither one is independent of the other (vs. 11-12) but neither is one to be confused with the other either (vs. 13-15). Verses 11 and 12 provide a great description of how the male/female relationship is supposed to value and appreciate the other. This guards against those men who are inclined to abuse their position as leader and think they are free to function any way they want. God made men to be different than women in physical features, in function and in roles, but he did not make men and women to live as if they do not need each other or that one is superior to the other. Since God appointed men to be leaders, it would be easy for men to conclude that they are somehow superior, when that is simply not the case. Verses 13-15 is where Paul is again making the same point we have been studying all along and that is this: There is not only clear gender distinctions that are made by God, but these distinctions are understood and expressed in obvious ways of hair and dress. These conventions of appearance influenced by "nature" or the natural way that people see things, or social norms are very important expressions of gender distinction. Paul was saying, "People, let's face it, the way people see it, is that if a man has long hair (implied and appears to be a woman) it is a disgrace to him. But a woman can have long hair and that is considered to be a credit to her. We do not live in a cocoon. The way we appear speaks about how we understand our gender. I was reading these verses carefully this week, and had an appointment to get my haircut. Perhaps I was thinking a little too much about v.14 when asked how did I want my hair? Frankly, I have toyed with the idea of just shaving my head, and seeing what that would be like, but at my age I am thinking that my hair just might choose not to grow back. Then I would have to grow my eyebrows and ...

Think of it like this: The Bible presents at least 5 great unions that are extremely important, but impossible for us to completely understand.

- 1) The Union of God Himself – Trinity
- 2) The Union of the two natures of Jesus Christ (humanity/deity)
- 3) The Union of the authorship process of the Bible – (Holy Spirit and men)
- 4) The Union of the believer into Christ. Are you in Christ, or is Christ in you? Do you live the Christian life, or does Christ live it through you?
- 5) The Union of the Husband and Wife into one.
- 6) The Union of the Believer into the Church. (could technically be a subset of #4)

In each of these unions, you cannot separate the parts without destroying them, but neither can you confuse them without distorting it. These unions make it very, very clear that while we are responsible for the lives that we live, our lives deeply and profoundly affect the lives of others around us. It matters how you live because you are reflecting upon me and we are reflecting upon our spouses, and we are reflecting upon God. And God is passionately interested in how He is portrayed before this world. That is why this

section is not fundamentally about the rules of communion. The Big idea that this text is screaming to us is that God is serious about Worship in the Church!

Read the Word, Pray the Word, Sing the Word, Preach the Word, See the Word and Do the Word. Our worship of God is not confined to a Sun AM service or to a worship gathering. Worship is what you were created for. But worship is not for you to feel better about yourself although true worship does bring a deep sense of comfort, resolve and security. Worship is rooted in the conviction that God alone is God and worthy of my whole-hearted, passionate trust, love, obedience and joy. Emotional, passionate worship is no substitute for obedience. Passionate worship without obedience is serious deception. Your obedience to God is the practical gauge of Who or what you are really worshipping. Feeling chilly bumps in church is not. Worship focuses upon God not myself. I do not have to have candles to worship. I do not have to have soft lighting, air conditioning, guitar, piano, choir, organ, praise teams, power point, hymnals, new songs or old songs to worship. I do not have to have a building to worship. I have to have Christ to worship. I have to have the Spirit to worship. I have to be governed by the Word in order to worship. Therefore I have to have a heart that seeks to be pure, honest, and humble before God. I can only come to God through Christ. And while I can and must worship God personally, I am also called to gather with other believers and worship God with others. Worship matters to God. The private, individual worship of God matters. The public, corporate worship of God by his church matters. Please, please understand this. The heart of worship and the form of worship matters to God. The attitude of worship and the action of worship matters. You can have the right actions and not have the right attitude. But, if you do not have the right attitude, it will eventually affect your actions. You can have the right attitude and if so, you will pursue the right actions in worship. That is what this text is about. Verses 17-22 focus more on the attitude part and verses 23-34 focus more on the action part. Let's dig in.

Paul (v.2) saw some things that he was able to commend in this church and he pointed that out. Even though there were some things that he had to correct, there were obviously some people who were still taking to heart the things that Paul had taught. That spirit of commendation and encouragement even as he is correcting them (vs. 2-16) is now gone! His language and tone (v.17) is very, very strong here.

1. **God does not tolerate division within His Church.** (17-19)

Notice in v.17 Paul talks about the meetings. The church gathered is the actual church. The church at Corinth did not have a building that they called the church. They met in a home that did not become a church. The church met, when the church came into that home. Some of the reformers used to actually put locks on the doors of the church buildings through the week, so that the people would not come to the building to pray because they did not people associating the presence of God with a particular building, since that is one big step toward idolatry. When we attribute, or associate God with an icon, an image, a building, etc., we are giving it value that it otherwise does not have. But, when we use things for the worship of God, such as bread and juice in communion, we do not treat them casually.

By the way, a little side note here. How often did the church gather? 16.1 is clear that they met on the 1st day of the week (Sunday) and since they ate a meal together, as part of this gathering, they probably met in the evening of the 1st day. Check out Acts 20.7.

What is very clear is that their meetings were the occasion for huge problems. What the gathering looks like is often driven by the culture. I have preached in India in settings where the women sat on one side of the room and the men on the other. In that setting, it may have been a bit scandalous for the genders to sit together. But, that setting can be dangerous too. That setting can communicate the idea that women are 2nd rate. Since the early churches usually met in homes there was a high degree of possibility that the way they met reflected some of the cultural influences of that home.

For example, the larger homes of that day had what was called a triclinium, which was a dining room where the people reclined to eat. This was more of an inner room, while the atrium was where the rest of the household, servants and the like would eat. The Corinthian world was divided very, very clearly between the haves and the have-nots. There was functionally, no middle-class. The upper crust did not socialize, associate, nor eat with those who were not on their level. Each kind (socially, economically, educationally) stayed with their own kind. That has been the functional history of the world, but that is not the message of the gospel. While a parent may say, it is not proper to eat with those people, Christ says, if you love me, you must! Some scholars have speculated (and I tend to agree with them) that since the wealthy believers would share a particular cultural expectation and expression about manners and customs in eating, that they frankly, ate together in the triclinium, and left the rest to eat in the 2nd class and rather cramped quarters of the atrium.

There is nothing like a church pot-luck dinner to bring out all sorts of issues, is there? I know a guy who will not eat at church dinners, because he does not know how the food was prepared. (Like you do at Rally's? – c'mon!) You bring more food than others – potential resentment. If you are angry at someone, you do not want to eat their food, do you? Wouldn't that be terrible to be eating something that is really good, only to find out that it was made by someone you are angry at? Now, you have to pay a compliment to someone that you dislike. Oh what stress! Or someone takes the last piece of meat before you go through the line – bitterness. Someone buys a dessert at the store, you make yours from a box, while someone else (to hear them tell it) grows the wheat, grinds it into flour, raises the chickens, gathers the eggs, imports the sugar from a cousin in Hawaii and follows a recipe that the Almighty Himself gave some Amish woman in Shipshewanna. Pride!

I was at a church dinner one night in Pennsylvania, where there was a monstrous amount of food. Some dear lady had made a Dutch apple pie. I had a piece and it was so good, I had another. Later on, I noticed that no one else had a piece of her pie, so I ate a third. Later on, I ate a fourth, she was so happy, I just went ahead and finished the whole thing. Believe me, I was just trying to minister to this dear saint and let her know that her labor in the Lord was not in vain. I was vain, but she wasn't.

But think about it. Let's say that you are part of the lower class in Corinth. Your church gathering for the meal and the Lord's Supper is at 6pm. You work hard to get your responsibilities taken care of so that you can make the meeting on time. You do not eat because you will be fed at the gathering. When you get there, it is obvious that the wealthier people have already met, and ate. They have had the finest of foods and are even a little inebriated from the fine wine. By the time you get there, you and the rest of the believers are given a few scraps left over and barely a sip of wine to drink. Do you look forward to gatherings where you are made to feel like a 2nd rate person? Do you enjoy school when you are left out? Do you enjoy the office parties, the family gatherings, the wedding receptions, graduation parties or social events where no one talks to you, and where you are treated as a nobody? We hate those things! We would rather die than go! Why? Because there is a not so subtle message that says – You do not belong here. You do not fit in. You are not one of us.

Now let's stop here for a second. What is going on with that? The people who appear to be on the inside are using this artificial division to prop up their shallow, pathetic, empty self-perception. We are better because we have created a scenario where we belong and you don't. That is all that the world has. Now, does that tug at our hearts? Oh yea! So, in reaction to that, we want to say, "You belong here." We are a people who are going to love you, affirm you, encourage you, accept you, help you, motivate you, solve all of your problems, make you happy, etc. That sounds noble. That sounds Jesus-like even. But is that realistic? There is another dimension to this.

Let's say that I have a 12 year old daughter who is going into Jr. Hi. Jr. Hi and High School can be tough years on a kid who is trying to figure out who she is, and where she fits in. So, I say to our Student Ministries Pastor, Patrick, you had better make sure that my kid fits in. You had better get rid of all cliques, all groups, all personal friendships and create a perfectly level social playing field for my kid. Let's also say that my kid does not love God, does not care about the Word of God, the worship of God and does not care about other people. The only thing my kid cares about is playing video games, watching re-runs of Star Trek and sleeping in on Sundays. Therefore my kid only shows up once every six weeks. How can the church make my kid fit in? It can't! Even if you found a perfect church, it couldn't. You belong here. But the only thing that makes us belong is Christ and if you or your kids do not have a heart for Christ, then you are not going to feel like you belong, because He is the glue! That is what Paul is saying in v.19!

A. Some division reveals God's approval. (19)

There are some divisions, because not every person has a heart for God.

I will come back to this next week, but I think we have enough to chew on for today. But, I really want you to think this through with me as we wrap it up. If I asked you if you ever felt like you did not belong here, that you were on the outside, or if you ever wondered if you left, would anyone really notice, does anyone really care? I would guess that every single person here has felt or feels that way a bit. That internal struggle of

belonging is part of the affect of the fall. We all face that. Myself included. Honestly, there is some truth to it. We do not love each other perfectly, yet. So, would I be missed, well, maybe not that much, if someone perceived to be better than me came and took my place. Our relationships as a body of believers must go deeper than working side by side in doing a ministry together. That is good and important, but there is more. As a believer, you are not a lug-nut in a machine, who's only value is to hold a bracket in place. You are a person, known by and loved by God, who ought to be known, loved, and nurtured by the church so that you can know, love and nurture others as an expression of God's love for you. That love in the church crosses and celebrates the socio-economic categories created by our world. But that love in the church also reveals who really loves God and who just loves self.

B. Some division is driven by arrogance.

2. God does not tolerate hypocrisy within His Church. (20-22)