



PRODIGAL

CHURCH

DATE: SUNDAY, OCTOBER 18TH, 2020

SERIES: PRODIGAL CHURCH

SPEAKER: CRAIG VERNALL

SERIES TITLE: UNHOLY COMMUNION

SCRIPTURE: 1 CORINTHIANS 11:17-32

Hello Everyone! As a way to start off this week's Life Group, why don't you spend some time praying for our newly elected government regardless of where you stand on the political spectrum. You'll agree that it's certainly challenging times for any person to be in government. So, be encouraged by these words from Paul's letter to the Romans.

"Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. ² Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. ³ For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and you will be commended. ⁴ For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. ⁵ Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience.

⁶ This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. ⁷ Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor." Romans 13: 1-7.

Once again, we dive straight into the middle of the Corinthian church's woeful ways! Paul is addressing the way the Corinthians are behaving during what we call Holy Communion. The Corinthians called these times their "Love Feasts." Sadly, there wasn't much love going on between them and the feasting was being done by the wealthy few. So, let's see how Paul addresses them.

READ 1 CORINTHIANS 11:18-19.

"In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good. ¹⁸ In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. ¹⁹ No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval."

Q1. How would you feel if someone with the reputation of Paul told you that your church services were doing more harm than good?

Q2. Paul is quite comfortable telling the Corinthians that he can see by their individual behaviours which among them had God's approval. Do you do this? Can you tell by someone's actions whether they're genuine Jesus followers?

Below Paul specifies what it is that he has deep concerns over. (Paul is hearing reports from others who have written to him who are concerned about these problems.)

"²⁰ So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, ²¹ for when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another gets drunk. ²² Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? Certainly not in this matter!"

I hope this is hard for us to imagine. How could a church service get so divided and people so misbehaved? This only highlights the challenge Paul faced with this young church and how exceptionally misguided some of their actions were.

Q3. The unity of the Church is a vital dynamic that we must all participate in and serve to strengthen. Are you intentional with your efforts to ensure we don't have division amongst us? How can we do this better?

Q4. How do we ensure that church life doesn't become a place that humiliates or marginalizes the poor? Are we seeking to embrace those who, for any reason, are financially less fortunate than you/we may be?

OBSERVATION.

We can see above that Paul encouraged people to eat at home rather than come to a church service with the intention of dining (and drinking) well. Maybe that's why the tradition of a communion service now leads us to the practice of eating and drinking small quantities of the bread and wine.

Below, Paul is now reminding the Corinthians of what he taught them when he was with them. So, in a sense Paul is now conducting a remedial class of how to honour the Lord and each other during the Lord's supper. Note in verse 23 below, Paul reminds them that he had previously passed on instructions about how to do communion.

"²³ For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night 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, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me." ²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes."

Q5. The Lord's supper is a powerful instrument through which we connect with the centerpiece of the Christian faith. That being Jesus' death and resurrection. Can you describe to others what Holy Communion means to you?

Below, Paul highlights the sacredness of Communion. He asks the Church to have a right attitude when entering into what is a "close encounter" moment with the Lord. During this sacred time, we're always aware of the Holy Spirit's presence. God draws close to us during this time.

²⁷ So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. ²⁹ For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. "

Q6. Paul is asking for a spiritual awareness from each of us. He's calling us to a deep level of honest reflection about the state of our own soul. How do you go about the process of examining the state of your soul? (Particularly before communion)

Paul now turns his attention to the consequences of a flippant attitude towards taking communion. He now suggests that people are becoming physically unwell because of their lack of spiritual examination. (In saying this, if the Corinthians were getting drunk regularly that wouldn't be helping their health either)

However, this seems to be a case of action and consequence. Paul has frequently reminded the Corinthians "I have the right to do anything," you say- but not everything is beneficial" 1 Cor 10:23.

³⁰ That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. ³¹ But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment. ³² Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world."

In keeping with the idea of free will and the right to anything, can you see the law of action and consequence happening here? The spiritual life is impacting the physical life.

Q7. Discuss the following statement that I raised during my talk on Sunday:

"God gives you the sacred gift of making your own choices. But God does not give you immunity from the natural consequences of what will result from your free will choice"

FINALLY:

Join together to share the Lord's supper if its practical to do so.