

Lesson 16 (1 Corinthians 11:17-34)

I. Criticism of abuses at the Lord's Supper (11:17-22)

A. ¹⁷ Now in this that I declare *unto you* I praise *you* not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse. ¹⁸ For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it.

1. Paul began Chapter 11 with a note of praise, but as he enters this section of the chapter he sounds a note of reproach rather than a note of praise.

2. The phrase "come together" occurs five times in this section (11:17, 18, 20, 33, 34) and elsewhere in Paul's letters only in Chapter 14.

a) The phrase "come together in the church" in verse 18 does not refer to their coming together in a church building. Instead, it refers to their coming together as a church; that is, coming together for the worship assembly. 1 Corinthians 16:2 tells us that this assembly would have occurred on the first day of the week, which Revelation 1:10 refers to as the Lord's Day.

3. Where did they meet?

a) If they met in the home of a wealthier member that was large enough to accommodate the entire group, then space limitations would have split the group into at least two parts. Some of the guests would have been invited to eat in the triclinium, which would correspond to a modern-day dining room. The others would have been squeezed into the atrium, similar to an entry hall.

(1) An atrium was an open central court, from which the enclosed rooms led off, in a large ancient Roman house.

(2) A triclinium is a room in a Roman building characterized by three surfaces on three sides of a low square table, those surfaces sloped away from the table at about 10 degrees. Diners would recline on these surfaces in a semi-recumbent position. The fourth side of the table was left open, presumably to allow service to the table. Dining was the defining ritual in Roman domestic life, lasting from late afternoon through late at night. Typically, 9-20 guests were invited, arranged in a prescribed seating order to emphasize divisions in status.

b) As we will see, this division in the building may have led to the division in the Lord's Supper. For those keeping score, this is the second example of division that may have come about from the so-called "home church" model that the Corinthians practiced. We discussed the first example when we considered the divisions in Chapter 1.

- (1) We should thank God every day for the building we have in which we come together as the church. For some reason, there is a move afoot in some congregations to return to the "home church" model. That model created divisions in the first century, and if we follow that model we should not be shocked if it once again creates division. Of course, in my experience, those advocating this model are counting on it creating division -- they want to divide and conquer. False teachers almost never start out with large departures among large groups; instead they begin with small departures among small groups. The home church model is the perfect way to accomplish that goal.
- c) The divisions that Paul mentions here are not theological divisions. Instead they are divisions between the haves and the have-nots.
- (1) These rifts in the congregation were no doubt always present, but they really came to the surface during the Lord's Supper.
 - (2) "The potential for dissension within the congregation is evident. Most members had in common only their Christianity. They differed widely in educational attainment, financial resources, religious background, and political skills."
 - (3) **Barclay:** The early Church was the one place in all the ancient world where the barriers were down. That world was very rigidly divided; there were the free men and the slaves; there were the Greeks and the barbarians-the people who did not speak Greek; there were the Jews and the Gentiles; there were the Roman citizens and the lesser breeds without the law; there were the cultured and the ignorant. The Church was the one place where all men could and did come together. A great Church historian has written about these early Christian congregations, "Within their own limits they had solved almost by the way the social problem which baffled Rome and baffles Europe still. They had lifted woman to her rightful place, restored the dignity of labour, abolished beggary, and drawn the sting of slavery. The secret of the revolution is that the selfishness of race and class was forgotten in the Supper of the Lord, and a new basis for society found in love of the visible image of God in men for whom Christ died."
- d) What did Paul mean when he said he partly believed the report?
- (1) Perhaps he just didn't want to believe it, but he had to believe it because of the credibility of his source, whom we know he has been relying on for the earlier portions of the letter.
 - (2) Others think he was expressing mock disbelief for rhetorical effect -- "I just can't believe you are really doing this!"
 - (3) The word translated "partly," however, carries a wide range of meanings in the New Testament and may refer to a matter or a report. It need not be translated adverbially ("partly"). The same word is translated "in this behalf" or "in this part" in 2 Corinthians 9:3. Paul could be simply saying "I believe a

certain report."

- B.** ¹⁹ For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.
1. This verse, which has been called one of the true puzzles in this letter, seems surprising in light of Paul's condemnation of their factions in 1:10-17.
 - a) The Greek word *hairesis* {hah'-ee-res-is} that is used here is also found in Galatians 5:20 among Paul's list of works of the flesh. Although we use the word today to apply to doctrinal divisions, it had a broader meaning in the first century and included divisions based, for example, on personal rivalries.
 2. Is Paul really now of the opinion that those factions or heresies are necessary and serve some useful purpose?
 - a) Some say yes. They argue (correctly) that the truth divides. The word of God is a sword, and like a sword it divides whatever it strikes.
 - (1) **Hebrews 4:12** For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.
 - b) Jesus himself created division, which is something we should note before arguing as we sometimes do that those who cause division are always in the wrong.
 - (1) **Luke 12:51** Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division.
 - (2) **John 7:43** So there was a division among the people because of him.
 - (3) **John 10:19** There was a division therefore again among the Jews for these sayings.
 - c) Like a surgeon removing a cancer, division is sometimes necessary for the health of the Christian body, but again like surgery, it should be a last resort. Absent that division, the healthy part of the body will soon become just as diseased as the cancerous part, and eventually will die.
 - d) Those who promote unity at any cost soon find themselves unified against God, and if you need an example just consider the denominational world and its attempts to maintain unity with those who support the homosexual agenda. In the end, they will be perfectly united -- but with Satan rather than with God.

3. In that sense, divisions do serve a useful purpose, but I don't think that is what Paul is talking about here. Why?
 - a) The Greek word "for" at the beginning of this verse indicates that the statement in this verse provides evidence for Paul's dismay in the previous verse. This verse explains why Paul cannot praise them. After reading this section of the letter, do we really believe there is some "approved" group that Paul is praising here in verse 19.
 - b) The context here is focused on divisions along socioeconomic lines. In that context, it is hard to understand why Paul would suddenly insert an aside regarding divisions along theological lines, with an approved group being divided from the unapproved groups.
4. So, what then is Paul saying?
 - a) I think once again we see Paul expressing bitter irony about the sad situation in Corinth.
 - b) The word translated "approved" does not need to refer to those who have shown themselves to be outstanding Christians. Instead, it can denote someone who is a dignitary in human terms.
 - c) Certainly those likely to be invited to recline in the triclinium would come from the ranks of the most dignified members of the church -- from a worldly perspective. If verse 19 refers to this group then it could be translated "For there actually has to be discrimination in your meetings, so that the elite may stand out from the rest." If it weren't for their divisions, then how would anyone know that some of the Christians were actually much more important and valued by God than the other Christians! Some might even get the impression that all people are equally valued by God! Horrors!
 - d) This interpretation makes the most sense to me, and after spending time with Paul it is not difficult to picture him saying it!
 - e) Paul wants them to understand that those tested and approved by God are almost always quite different from the dignitaries who stand out according to worldly standards.
- C. ²⁰ When ye come together therefore into one place, *this* is not to eat the Lord's supper. ²¹ For in eating every one taketh before *other* his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken.
 1. The phrase "of the Lord" in verse 20 ("supper of the Lord") occurs only once more in the New Testament, in Revelation 1:10 where John refers to the Day

of the Lord. Christians partake of the Supper of Lord on the Day of the Lord.

2. Paul again uses the phrase "come together" and this time he stresses that they come together in one place.
 - a) Some use this verse and others to argue that dividing a congregation up into Bible classes is wrong. They argue that when the church comes together it must meet all together, and meeting in groups is wrong.
 - b) I disagree with their attempt to bind that opinion on others because I do not believe that the Bible prohibits meeting in groups for Bible study -- but from a practical viewpoint they have a point. It is very difficult to create division in a congregation when everyone hears everything that is said. Division generally starts in small groups and later spreads to larger groups. Bible classes serve a very important role in the church, but, if unmonitored, they can cause much more harm than good. James did not say "let many of us become teachers."
3. The phrase "taketh before" in verse 21 is crucial in understanding the context here.
 - a) It is often interpreted temporally so that Paul is saying that some eat without waiting for anybody else. Those who arrived first, according to this view, began eating and drinking on their own schedule so that they had too much by the time the others arrived.
 - (1) If this view is correct, then the late arrivals were probably poor freedmen getting off from work and slaves who had no control over their personal schedule. The upper class Christians could arrive early and enjoy a meal without their lower class counterparts. It is possible that this upper class group not only arrived first, but they also ate by themselves and had more and better food to eat.
 - b) Others argue that there is no temporal meaning in view here at all. The problem is not that some jump the gun by eating before the others arrive. Instead, the problem is that they devour their own ample supply of food in front of their fellow Christians who have little or nothing to eat.
 - (1) A point in favor of this view is that the temporal rendering of the verb "taketh before" really makes little sense in this context. If Paul says that "every one" goes ahead and eats without waiting for the others then "every one" must be limited to the early arrivals. But then why does he say that some are drunk and some are hungry? The hungry must be the late arrivals, but he does not refer to this second group and under this view they could not be included among the "every one" group.
 - c) The problem Paul is addressing occurred during the common meal.

- (1) This common meal was not a potluck dinner in which each guest brought something to share with the others, but was more like a brown bag meal. The Romans had "basket dinners" in which the guests would bring their own dinners to another's house to eat. These meals were not shared.
- (2) Paul condemns this practice in the church. (Although I think our own brown bag suppers would likely escape his condemnation!) The problem was that this practice in the church emphasized and entrenched the social disparity that already existed.
- (3) And this class distinction likely extended from the Lord's Supper into the rest of the worship service. James had much to say about that sad state of affairs:
 - (a) James 2:1-4 My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. 2 For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, 3 and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool," 4 have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts?
- d) The presence of this attitude in the church was much more serious than a simple breach of social etiquette.
 - (1) They may have thought they were partaking of the Lord's supper, but they were not -- and that is serious indeed. They could not label that meal the Lord's supper when they came together and acted like that. It had become their supper rather than the Lord's supper.
 - (2) A purpose of the Lord's supper is to convey to every participant that he or she is precious to God. The Corinthians' meal by contrast told some that they were worthless nobodies. It was tainted by the deadly combination of indulgence and indifference.
 - (3) Their selfish devouring of their own food contrasts with Jesus taking bread. Both take, but the Corinthians take on their own behalf while Jesus takes on behalf of others. Each Christian shares equally in the benefits of Christ's sacrifice, but they were not sharing equally at the Corinthians' meal. For slaves, this may have been the only good meal they would have all week, and they were going away hungry!
 - (4) Paul's message about their meal is clear -- call it what you like, but don't call it the Lord's supper.
- e) The word "drunken" in verse 21 does not necessarily mean that they were inebriated with alcohol. The Greek word methuo can mean simply glutted, saturated, or drenched. They had their fill of both food and drink.

D. ²² What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise *you* not.

1. Paul clearly addresses the "haves" in verse 22. The poor did not have houses to eat and drink in.
 - a) In the ancient world, the poor did not have kitchens in their tiny homes, but they instead prepared their food on outdoor portable grills or ate out. Only the privileged had the luxury of eating in their homes.
 - b) "For the poor, a formal meal was had only for special occasions; thus the regular Christian community meal would have had far greater significance than a meal would among the wealthy."
 - c) Paul must be addressing those who have houses to eat in and have enough status to despise and shame the have-nots.
2. The have-nots included not just the poor but also those who did not belong to a social unit or household; what we might call the singles.
 - a) "Those who were the most vulnerable to the famines and other economic problems that regularly plagued the ancient economy were persons unattached to a household. They needed their household of faith to shown concern for their welfare."
3. Why were some Christians oblivious to the needs of their fellow Christians?
 - a) "The answer is that they were too much at home in a culture in which contempt for the poor was typical of the wealthier class. The well-to-do were used to having servants stand around as they ate and also would have no misgivings about feasting in the presence of others who had nothing or had only inferior fare."
 - b) At Roman meals, guests of different rank were served different dishes and wines of different quality, according to their respective dignities.
 - c) Christian congregations, with their shared meals including masters and slaves, shattered conventional social barriers. Some of the wealthier Corinthian Christians, however, seem to have wanted to retain those barriers.
 - d) The knowledgeable and spiritual Corinthians may have even argued that since the Lord's supper was fellowship with Christ, it didn't really matter what each person had to eat. As we saw in Lesson 14, however, Paul had already reminded them that the Lord's supper was a fellowship with

Christ and with each other.

4. The end result of this behavior was to despise the church of God.
 - a) The people being shamed and despised belonged to God, and God does not take it lightly.
 - b) Jesus was oppressed and afflicted on our behalf, and if we then turn around and oppress and afflict our fellow Christians it indicates that we despise the church that Jesus purchased with his blood.
 - c) The church is the household of God. We are a family, and we must share with each other as we would with members of our own family.

5. Many commentaries seem to flip through these chapters of First Corinthians and see only small problems -- abusing the liberty of eating meat offered to idols, and now eating too much at a church social. But these are very far from minor problems.
 - a) Remember that Paul led off by considering fornication, and as we saw, Paul said it is a unique sin that strikes at the very heart of a Christian's relation to Christ and his church. Paul commanded that we flee fornication.
 - b) The issue of idol meat was so serious that Paul characterized it as dining with demons. Paul commanded that we flee idolatry.
 - c) This current issue is so serious that we are in danger of despising the church of God and of eating and drinking damnation. A minor issue? Hardly! What could be more serious?

6. We should pause for a moment and consider the question "despise ye the church of God?"
 - a) I fear that we may have some today who also despise the church of God. How else can we describe someone who spends each day trying to turn the Lord's church into a denomination and trying to convince the world that the eternal kingdom made without hands is nothing more than a movement of men that originated in the 1800's? How else can we describe someone who disregards what the word of God has to say about being added to the body of Christ and instead creates a man-made gospel in which baptism is optional? How else can we describe someone who belittles the church, who seeks to change the church, and who tries to remove all that is distinctive about the church? If they do not despise the church of God, then how would their actions differ if in fact they did despise the church of God? I think Paul would ask these change agents the same question he asked the Corinthians -- despise ye the church of

God?

II. Reminder of the Origin of the Lord's Supper (11:23-26)

- A. ²³ For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the *same* night in which he was betrayed took bread: ²⁴ And when he had given thanks, he brake *it*, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. ²⁵ After the same manner also *he took* the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink *it*, in remembrance of me.
1. Paul now abruptly recites the origin of the Lord's Supper to reinforce the point he is making with the Corinthians. It is the only place in his letters where he inserts a specific citation like this corresponding to a narrative from the gospels. Depending on how you date the gospels, this may very well be the earliest recorded account we have of any words spoken by Jesus.
 2. Why does he include this material? The context suggests he does so for the purpose of illustration. He is reinforcing the point he made in verses 17-22 and the point he will return to in verses 27-34. He wants to contrast what Jesus did at the Last Supper with what the Corinthians were doing at their own supper.
 3. Paul is not trying to teach them anything new about the Lord's Supper, and he is not trying to correct their theology about the Lord's Supper. He assumes that they know what the Lord Supper means, and he is reminding them of that meaning to highlight their abuses.
 4. That Paul received this of the Lord has two possible meanings.
 - a) First, it could mean that Paul received this as a communication from the risen Lord -- and he could have received it directly or indirectly. Jesus spoke directly to Paul on the road to Damascus and he spoke indirectly to Paul a few days later through Ananias. Paul later spent 15 days in the company of Peter, who was present at this event.
 - b) Second, it could simply be used to reinforce the authoritative nature of the account. Paul also uses the phrase "on the night," which also reinforces the historical nature of the account. This is not just some sort of mythical story -- this is a factual account from the Lord about what happened on that specific night.
 5. Most translations use the word "betrayed," which would then refer to Judas' betrayal.
 - a) This translation makes sense because the betrayal was announced at the

Lord's Supper in the gospel accounts.

- b)** But while Mark uses the same Greek word to refer to Judas' betrayal, he also uses it to refer to the arrest of John the Baptist, the chief priests' handing Jesus over to Pilate, and Pilate's handing Jesus over to be crucified. Verse 23 could be translated "the same night in which he was handed over," in which case it could refer to more than Judas' betrayal.
 - c)** In fact, God delivered Jesus up for us all, and Jesus gave himself for us.
 - (1)** Romans 8:32 He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?
 - (2)** Ephesians 5:2 And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.
 - d)** Thus, if we translate "betrayed" as "delivered up" then the verse could be referring to God's purpose rather than Judas' treachery. An emphasis on God's purpose would seem to better fit the context of the Lord's Supper.
- 6.** The order of the events in this narrative is interesting.
- a)** Notice that Jesus took the bread, then ate dinner, and then took the cup. We, of course, partake of the bread and the cup without a meal in between, but the Corinthians appear to have followed the historical ordering by inserting their community meal in between the bread and the cup.
 - b)** "Historically, there cannot be the slightest doubt about the existence of a Lord's Supper celebration at which a full meal took place between the bread and the cup." (Now that's really "separate and apart"!)
 - c)** This ordering by the way further suggests that the temporal understanding of "taking before" in verse 21 is likely not the correct view. If some got an early start, then the late arrivals would have missed the taking of the bread, which preceded the meal.
- 7.** The reference to blood in verse 25 emphasizes Jesus' sacrifice. The salvation celebrated in this meal came at the price of his blood.
- a)** Covenants are made through the shedding of blood. (Exodus 24:8) "And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words."
 - b)** Jeremiah spoke of a new covenant that was coming. (Jeremiah 31:31) "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant

with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah."

- c) These texts are combined in Hebrews 9:20 and 10:16-18 to emphasize that Jesus' perfect sacrifice replaces the ineffective blood of bulls and goats. (Hebrews 10:10) "[W]e are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."
8. Paul reminds them here as they recall Christ's perfect sacrifice that they each shared equally in the benefits of that sacrifice.
- a) The focus of that last supper was self-sacrifice, and those who partake of the Lord's Supper must follow the example of their master and partake with sacrificial love and concern for others.
 - b) Paul in effect is saying, "Christ gave his body equally for you all, but you do not give so much as the common bread equally to others."
- B. ²⁶ For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.
1. Verse 26 has been called the key to understanding why Paul recited this account of the Last Supper.
- a) The purpose of the Lord's Supper is to show the Lord's death until he comes again, but that purpose was being completely thwarted by the Corinthians' actions.
 - b) This showing of the Lord's death involves more than just a verbal recitation of the account that may have accompanied the Lord's Supper as it also often does today. Paul mentions eating and drinking five times in verses 26-29. Our actions in eating the bread and drinking the cup proclaim the Lord's death. But the Corinthians' actions were proclaiming nothing other than their own selfishness, which is why Paul said that their meal was not the Lord's Supper.
2. The Lord's Supper proclaims the Lord's death on a cross.
- a) That death stands diametrically opposed to the claims of social status that were at work in the Corinthian community and that seemed to be the force behind their abuses of the Lord's Supper.
 - b) "The Lord's Supper is founded on the sacrificial death of Jesus for others, and the attitude that led him obediently to that death should pervade the Lord's Supper for Christians ever after. The way the Corinthians conducted their supper, however, gave witness to a culture of selfishness and status-mongering. To conduct their supper in this way and to have the temerity to call it the Lord's Supper could lead only to their

condemnation."

3. We will continue to partake of the Lord's Supper each Lord's Day until the Lord comes again to claim his own.
 - a) A brief aside here: There is movement in the church called "Max Kingism" or "Realized Eschatology" teaching that all of the prophecies in the Bible occurred on or before AD 70, including all of the promises of the Lord's return. I deal with this heresy at length in my verse-by-verse class on Revelation (which I have taught at two different congregations in Dallas but have not been asked to teach at Katy). Without addressing it at length here, I will pause to ask the Kingites a simple question -- why do they continue to partake of the Lord's Supper each week if there is no future promise of the Lord's return?

III. Instructions to Correct the Abuses at the Lord's Supper (11:27-34)

- A. ²⁷ Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink *this* cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of *that* bread, and drink of *that* cup. ²⁹ For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.
 1. Paul next returns to his discussion of the Corinthians' abuses with a reference in verse 27 to those who eat the bread and drink the cup in an unworthy manner. To do so makes one guilty or liable for the body and blood of the Lord.
 - a) The word translated "unworthily" refers to doing something that does not square with the character or nature of something else. The Corinthians were eating the bread and drinking the cup, but they were not doing so in a way that squared with the meaning of the bread and that cup.
 - b) The word translated "guilty" or "liable" is a judicial term. It means that the Corinthians would be answerable to God for this abuse. It means that they would find themselves chargeable for the death of Christ.
 - c) Paul's logic is this: The Lord's Supper proclaims the death of Christ. Those who behavior at the Lord's Supper does not conform to what the death entails and requires show that they have effectively switched sides. They have left the Lord's side and aligned themselves with the princes of this world who crucified the Lord of glory.
 - d) Eating and drinking the Lord's body and blood has implications that no other eating and drinking ever does. It is fraught with spiritual peril if we treat the meal or those gathered for it in a cavalier manner. Those who do

so will incur the judgment of God.

- e) The divide is between those who lift up the cross of Christ with their own self-sacrifice versus those who put Christ to death again with their self-centered feasting.
2. Although no one is worthy of the Lord's Supper, we can eat it in a worthy manner. Paul gives us three tests to determine whether we are eating it worthily.
- a) First, verse 28 tells us that we must examine ourselves and we must do so in light of Christ's sacrifice. If we think of ourselves as notable dignitaries worthy of higher status, then we must check our pride at the door. The cross offers a very different standard for who can claim to be notable.
 - b) Second, verse 22 suggests that we must partake with concern for our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. If we partake with indifference to them then we are no longer partaking of the Lord's Supper. We must recognize that all Christians are joined together in one body, that all share equally in the blessings of Christ, and that all must be treated worthily.
 - c) Third, verse 29 tells us that we must discern the body. The Greek word used here means to differentiate by separating or to estimate or judge correctly.
3. What does it mean to discern the body?
- a) One view notes that Paul mentions the body but not the blood, and from that concludes that Paul is referring to the church. That is, Paul is referring to their failure to recognize the church as the body of Christ or their failure to recognize Christ's presence among his people. Thus, the body to be discerned is not just the bread on the table, but rather the body at the table.
 - b) Another view is that body is shorthand for the body and the blood and discerning the body refers to understanding what the bread and the cup represent. A proper understanding of these elements would change the Corinthians' attitude and behavior toward others. When they fully recognize the meaning of Christ's sacrifice as they partake of the bread and the cup, they will never seek to shame or despise their brothers and sisters in Christ.
4. Who then can partake? The German theologian Zacharius Ursinus answered that question in the following way in 1563:
- a) "Those who are displeased with themselves because of their sins, but

who nevertheless trust that their sins are pardoned and that their continuing weakness is covered by the suffering and death of Christ, and who desire more and more to strengthen their faith and to lead a better life. Hypocrites and those who are unrepentant, however, eat and drink judgment on themselves."

B. ³⁰ For this cause many *are* weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. ³¹ For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. ³² But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.

1. Verse 30 is the subject of much commentary and much disagreement.
2. There are two traditional views, and at least one less traditional view that we will consider.
 - a) The first traditional view is that the weak, the sickly, and the sleeping are those who are weak in faith, spiritually ill, and spiritually asleep. This view has much to offer, and I prefer it over the second traditional view, but it is not without its problems.
 - (1) The Greek word translated "sleep" is never used elsewhere of a spiritual sleep. It is always used for either literal sleep or death. The word translated "sick" is used four other times, each time for a physical illness.
 - b) The second traditional view is that Paul has in mind here real sickness and real death and that this sickness and death were punishments from God regarding their behavior. There are those who think such things never occurred in the church, but Ananias and Sapphira would probably not be numbered among them. But even so, this view (to me, anyway) seems contrary to the context of Paul's argument. If he really thought God was striking them dead for abusing the Lord's Supper then one might wonder why he didn't lead off with that point. Notice also that Paul says that many were in this condition. Are we really to conclude that God sent a plague on the Corinthian church, and that Paul mentions that great plague only here and only in passing?
 - c) I do not find either of these traditional views wholly satisfactory, although either could very well be Paul's intended meaning. The people could have been suffering spiritual illness because of their behavior, or they could have been suffering a physical illness due to punishment for their behavior. Physical punishments for immoral behavior were not unknown in the New Testament.
3. But there is a third possibility. A third option is that the weakness, sickness, and death are physical, but they were caused not by a punishment from God but by a lack of food.

- a) The picture Paul paints here is not of rich well-fed Christians surrounded by poor slightly less well-fed Christians with growling stomachs. The picture Paul paints is of rich well-fed Christians devouring food in front of the poor and the starving.
 - b) This disparity would be particularly true if (as some commentators believe) Corinth was undergoing a famine at this time -- perhaps related to the one prophesied by Agabus in Acts 11:28 (which likely *began* before this timeframe). These commentators also point to this famine as the "present distress" mentioned in Chapter 7.
 - c) Handout: The benchmark for confirming whether a famine had threatened an area in the Greco-Roman world was the appointment of a curator to cope with the threat. The office of "curator to the grain supply" (curator annonae) was crucial in the ancient world during severe shortages. Tiberius Claudius Dinippus held that office in Corinth no fewer than three times, including a time period shortly after Paul's departure in AD 51. Two inscriptions are shown on the handout confirming that he held this office in Corinth, and thus showing that famine was a real problem in that city during the timeframe we are considering.
 - d) Paul may simply be asking the Corinthians to look where their behavior has led. They are feasting in front of Christians who are weak, sick, and dying from a famine!
 - e) This view also explains the very strong language that Paul uses in this chapter to confront their behavior -- they are guilty for the death of Christ and they are eating and drinking condemnation on themselves. That is very strong language if all they were doing was simply starting to eat a little too early. Paul is not treating this situation as a minor problem in the slightest -- this is a major problem to Paul.
 - f) But what about verses 31-32? Don't the judgment and chastening by God in these verses refer to the illness and death in verse 30? Perhaps. And if so, then that would support one of the two traditional views. (Although innocents can suffer with the guilty in punishments from God. Children, for example, perished in the flood along with their parents.) But it may also refer back to the damnation in verse 29, which can be avoided if the Corinthians would only examine themselves and correct their behavior. If they judge themselves, they can avoid the judgment and condemnation by God that will otherwise result.
- C. ³³ Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another. ³⁴ And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come.
1. Paul once again uses the phrase "when ye come together" and it serves to

bracket the discussion that began back in verse 17.

2. What does Paul mean when he says they should "tarry one for another" or "wait for one another"?
 - a) The problem Paul is addressing will not be solved if the early arrivals simply wait for the late arrivals to show up before beginning to eat. The problem is that the have-nots (as the name suggests) do not have food, and that problem is independent of the order of their arrival. Even if Paul is requiring that they wait, he must also be requiring that they share what they have with those who arrive late.
 - b) The verb translated "tarry one for another" or "wait for one another" generally has a different meaning when used of persons. It generally means "to take or receive from another," "to entertain," or "to welcome." It could be translated "Care for one another" or "Receive one another warmly." Receiving someone at a feast meant that you would share what you have with that person, and that meaning fits the context here very well.
3. What does Paul mean when says "if any man hunger, let him eat at home"?
 - a) Some suggest he means simply that if anyone is too hungry to wait for the others then they should just eat at home. But, again, I am not convinced that Paul is asking anyone to wait, and in any event waiting would by itself not solve the problem.
 - (1) How would my feasting at home help those who have no food other than by perhaps simply not making them watch me eat in front of them? How can anyone eat the Lord's Supper with a full belly in the presence of those who are starving? Paul is not giving them license to indulge themselves and ignore their poor brethren so long as they do not do it in front of them. He does not believe that they can retreat from the demands of the gospel in their homes.
 - b) Paul's point here is that the worship assembly is not the place to satisfy one's hunger and eat one's fill. If they show up only to fill their bellies, then they are not there to proclaim the Lord's death. If they are intent only on indulging their fleshly appetites, then they should just stay home.
 - c) To do otherwise is to bring condemnation on them from the assembly rather than blessing. There's a point where people are just better off not coming to church. You think of those who come to the worship service and yet continue to reject the gospel message they hear week after week sometimes for many years. If they plan to persist in their rejection of the gospel, then shouldn't they just stay at home. Aren't they just heaping on condemnation by hearing the gospel and rejecting it afresh week after week? You think about all the people in the world who are starving for the

truth and then you think of those who hear it proclaimed each week and yet turn their nose up at it. I would not want to be in that position on judgment day. My advice to them would be the same as in verse 34 -- let him just stay at home.

4. Some use verse 34 and verse 22 to argue that we should not have kitchens in our church buildings and we should never share a common meal in the church building.
 - a) Well after 11 chapters we have finally stumbled onto the theme of Paul's letter to the Corinthians. Do you want to know how to solve the problem of division in the church? Do you want to know how to solve the problem of Christians going to temple prostitutes? What about the problem of attending meals in idol temples in the presence of demons? And how do we solve the problem of devouring our food while our famine stricken brethren watch? The answer is clear -- we develop a kitchen-centered theology! How ridiculous!
 - b) Talk about missing the point! Paul's point is not that the Corinthians should not share a common meal or have a time of fellowship. His point is that they were NOT sharing a common meal or having a time of fellowship. They were excluding those who had nothing while devouring their own food with indifference.
 - c) How could Paul possibly have been telling them that it's wrong to have a kitchen in a church building when they not only lacked a kitchen in their church building -- they lacked a church building! They were meeting in large homes that of course had kitchens.
 - d) And what about eating a common meal during the assembly. Did Paul tell them that was wrong? Hardly! He pointed back to the Last Supper itself and specifically noted in verses 24-25 that Jesus took the bread, ate the Passover dinner, and then took the cup.
5. We do not know what the other things are in verse 34 that Paul needs to instruct them about when he comes. Presumably these items would begin with point number two corresponding to the "first of all" in verse 18 that carried us all the way through the chapter!