

## 1 CORINTHIANS 11:27

### WHATEVER WERE YOU THINKING?

“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.”<sup>1</sup>

“**W**hatever was he thinking?” That is the question on the minds of many people who read of the fall of Eliot Spitzer the disgraced former governor of New York. After deliberately destroying so many icons of Wall Street and so vigorously attacking prostitution in New York, to have himself spent over \$80,000 on prostitutes in a ten month period leaves anyone perusing the news breathless.

Hard on the heels of the Spitzer revelation was the account detailing the downfall of Kwame Kilpatrick, the Mayor of Detroit, Michigan. He is now charged with perjury—lying under oath—concerning a romantic relationship carried on with a former Chief of Staff. Residents of this great city may well wonder, “What was he thinking?”

Now, in this previous week comes a report that the husband of United States Senator Debbie Stabenow was caught in a police raid cracking down on prostitution in the Detroit area. He has been a prominent liberal radio broadcaster. When I read this report, I could only ask, “What was he thinking?”

While news accounts of prominent individuals who act stupidly seize our attention, even more egregious actions are perpetuated among the professed people of God. They treat the Body of Christ with contempt, all the while imagining that they are doing nothing wrong. However, God is holy, and He takes seriously disrespect shown toward His Son’s Bride. As an example of such disrespect, consider what was happening in the Church of God at Corinth when the Apostle Paul wrote his first letter to that congregation.

**CONTEMPT FOR THE SAVIOUR** — This verse has occasioned a surprising number of refusals to participate in the Meal as people have confused the adverb used in this verse for an adjective. Thus, I have often heard people refuse to partake of the Meal because they are “not worthy.” While there are good reason why a person should not partake of the Meal, feelings is not one of them. “Unworthy,” in our text, is an adverb? Had Paul used an adjective, he would have spoken of the suitability of the individual who is approaching the Lord’s Table. However, in using the adverb, attention is focused on the attitude of the individual as he or she approaches the Table.

The context substantiates this point. The Corinthian Christians were being exposed as professing one thing with their mouths and revealing quite a different belief through their actions. They would likely have given hearty assent to the concept of the church being the Body of Christ, but their actions denied this essential truth. Before reviewing the precise actions that elicited this strong apostolic censure, let’s explore how God views a congregation.

In this letter, Paul develops a vigorous ecclesiology. Early in the letter, he speaks of the church as a field. In **1 CORINTHIANS 3:6-9**, he writes, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. He who plants and he who waters are one, and each will receive his wages according to his labour. For we are God’s fellow workers. You are God’s field, God’s building.”

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The verbal picture of the church as a field addresses that fact that all the plants that are planted in the field draw nutrients from a common source. They receive the same sunlight, similar amounts of moisture. And though it is possible, perhaps even likely, that an enemy will sow weeds among the good plants [see **MATTHEW 13:25**], the farmer will discourage His helpers from uprooting the weeds until the harvest is complete [see **MATTHEW 13:28-30**]. Paul's emphasis was on the shared requirements for health and for growth.

He then changes the picture to that of a building. "According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw—each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire" [**1 CORINTHIANS 3:10-15**].

Comparing a congregation to a building leads us to understand that no single portion of the building is more important than another, save for the foundation. Walls are important to permit shelter, and doors and windows permit entrance and egress and light. The roof protects from the elements, but neither the walls nor the roof will be supported if there is a flawed foundation. Paul clearly states that the only acceptable foundation is Jesus Christ. Denominational affiliation, worship structure, missionary endeavour—all alike is doomed to failure if the foundation is wrong. So, when the Apostle speaks of a congregation as a building, we understand that he is directing us to review the foundation. Nevertheless, his word picture reminds us of the integrated nature of each member within the building.

Then, closely following the imagery of a building that he has just introduced, Paul asks, "Do you not know that you [plural] are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you [plural]? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him. For God's temple is holy, and you [plural] are that temple" [**1 CORINTHIANS 3:16, 17**]. This concept of the church as the Temple of God is iterated when Paul challenges these same Corinthians by asking, "What agreement has the Temple of God with idols" [**2 CORINTHIANS 6:16**]?

He makes a similar reference in **EPHESIANS 2:19-22**, when he writes, "You are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit." Here, he also introduces the thought that a church is the "household of God." This imagery is echoed in **COLOSSIANS 2:7**.

To be certain, the Apostle will speak of the individual Christian as a Temple of the Holy Spirit, but a congregation of Christ the Lord is a Holy Temple where the Spirit of God dwells. Whenever the people of God act in unity and express the harmony of the Spirit, they are revealing that God is at work among them. However, when they bite and devour one another, they are demonstrating quite a different spirit controlling them—they are already defeated.

Without the unity of the Spirit, a church is just a religious organisation. The concept of a congregation as a Temple of God reminds us that worship is the natural result of God dwelling with His people. The absence of harmony, the presence of rage and attack, is effective evidence that such a group is no longer a Temple of God; there can be no worship within such a structure.

However, in the pages of the New Testament, the Apostle Paul is the primary proponent of the concept of a congregation as the Body of Christ. In **1 CORINTHIANS 10:16, 17** he introduces the concept by challenging the Corinthians to think. “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.” Participating at the Lord’s Table testifies that the body is healthy because each part functions for the welfare of the whole body.

The Apostle appeals to the Roman Christians to actively live out the concept of life as the Body of Christ when we writes, “By the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness” [**ROMANS 12:3-8**].

Here, Paul teaches that a congregation is not a political or social entity, but rather it is a living Body. This point of view certainly flies in the face of modern ecclesiastical concepts. The thought of the church as political entity is the stepchild of contemporary governmental regulations to which the churches have submitted; and the social concept has been strengthened through the segregation of the churches of our Lord into racial and cultural enclaves. The political expression of the modern church soon predominates and grows more prominent than the social aspect because there is no biblical mooring for social interaction. Friendships divorced from biblical authority tend to become cliques. Our self-centred society leads us to mistake cliques for fellowship and soon our churches are reduced to political entities.

Because modern Christians appear more focused on political goals—controlling the “direction” of the congregation or keeping the pastoral staff under their thumbs—such religious organisations sacrifice the power of God for transient expediency. Each part of the Body God has created has a vital role to play for the benefit of the whole. There is no room for rugged individualism at the expense of the whole Body. Each member is responsible to work to build every other member. This is accomplished as each one exercises the gifts God has entrusted to them and as they maintain the unity of the Spirit.

The theme of unity as the Body of Christ is echoed in **EPHESIANS 4:1-7**. “I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all. But grace was given to each one of us according to the measure of Christ’s gift.”

We are saved to serve. The sphere of our service is the Body of Christ. Because it is the Body of Christ, and because our life is hidden in Him, we are extremely foolish if we harm or even destroy that Body. Instead, we are responsible to do all that is humanly possible to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We are to understand that God is ruling over us instead of allowing ourselves to attempt to take control and run things as we think best. We are to act with humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love.

Paul continues his review of the local congregation as the Body of Christ when he writes, “He gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love” [EPHESIANS 4:11-16].

In **1 CORINTHIANS 12:14-27**, Paul provides an extensive concept of how the church should function. In this passage, he gives a thorough review of congregational body life. He compares each member of the Body to various parts of the human body. Thus each member plays a role in ensuring the health of the entire Body; and just as no part can be injured without hurting the entire body, so no member of the congregation can be injured without harm to the entire body. He teaches an integrated wholeness that results in health and strength for the Body.

This is what he writes: “The body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot should say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear should say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

“The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you,’ nor again the head to the feet, ‘I have no need of you.’ On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and on those parts of the body that we think less honourable we bestow the greater honour, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honour to the part that lacked it, that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honoured, all rejoice together.

“Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.”

God saves those who come to Him in faith through Christ Jesus the Lord. Saved, the people of God are indwelt by the Spirit of God who gifts each one as He determines best for the Body to which He also appoints. Each Christian is appointed to serve within a Body, investing his or her gifts in the various members so that the Body is made strong. In fact, the Apostle will teach these Corinthians that the gifts are distributed for “upbuilding and encouragement and consolation” [see **1 CORINTHIANS 14:3**].

Establish in your mind the concept that the church is not an organisation which you join; rather, it is a Body to which you are appointed. Therefore, we sin against God whenever we begin to imagine that we must control the church, for no one of us, nor any group among us, can be the Head; that position is occupied by Jesus the Saviour. We do not “hire” a preacher, nor do we “fire” a preacher. We do not assign individuals to tasks, but rather we prayerfully seek whom God would appoint to a responsibility within the Body. We do not find permission in Scripture to blow up at those appointed to teach and remove ourselves from the Body for months, but we make every effort to preserve the unity of the Body.

Now we can return to the question that was raised earlier, asking what were the Corinthian Christians doing that was such an egregious violation of Christian truth? In order to answer that question, turn back to **1 CORINTHIANS 11:18-21**. “When you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized. When you come together, it is not the Lord’s Supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk.”

Powerful members of the congregation—members who assumed power by virtue of personal wealth, through social standing or length of membership—introduced factionalism into the worship of Christ; they had become schismatic in their conduct. The introduction of schisms into the Body of Christ is perhaps the most egregious violation of Body unity imaginable. These professing Christians, through eating without sharing what they had and through drinking without sharing what they had, revealed a schismatic attitude. Their lack of concern for the overall health of the Body and for the welfare of the most vulnerable was heretical. They were becoming malignant cancers in the Body of Christ, silently introducing heretical attitudes.

**CONDEMNATION OF THE SAINTS** — The Corinthian Christians had reduced the Lord’s Supper to an act of personal devotion. They failed to see the necessity of confessing communion, or fellowship. Fellowship was expressed by merely being together at the time of the observance in their estimate, failing to see that fellowship is much deeper than merely sharing the same table. For this reason, Paul, having detailed the specific acts that could only be seen as sinful, continued by speaking of the meaning of the Meal

“I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, 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.” 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.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” [**1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-26**].

The Meal was intended to be a confession of Christ’s sacrifice, to be certain. As such, each individual would be required to examine his or her own motive, ensuring that they truly accepted His death on their behalf. The Apostle had already dealt with the fact that the Meal was anticipatory by setting out the fact that the Corinthians were partaking of the Meal when they came together as a church. In other words, it was in assembly that they shared the Meal.

There is no hint to this point that the Corinthians had perhaps slipped into salvific error. Neither is there any evidence that they were not living in anticipation of the Lord’s return, though they had not thought through the impact of their actions at His return. Though these professed saints undoubtedly believed in the death of Christ as a sacrifice for their sin, and though they undoubtedly believed they were living in anticipation of His return, the missing element from their observance was fellowship, or communion.

When the Apostle of Love began his first letter, he wrote, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us—that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And we are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.”

Then, shifting his focus slightly, he declared, “This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin” [1 JOHN 1:1-7].

Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. This is a shared fellowship as the Apostle makes evident when he writes, “If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another.” There is another side to that sobering thought, which is that if we are walking in darkness, we have no fellowship with one another, for after all, “What fellowship has light with darkness” [2 CORINTHIANS 6:14]? “We are the temple of God” [2 CORINTHIANS 6:16]. When we are gathered in assembly, we are the temple of God. However, when Monday rolls around, we are still the temple of God. All through the week, and down to the weekend, we are still the temple of God. As we partake of this Meal, we declare before God, angels and all who witness the act that we are the temple of God. This is a solemn declaration for us as a people. It was on the basis of this divine truth that all who were unbaptised were excluded from the Meal among the apostolic churches.

Clearly, Paul is saying that God was offended by the attitude of the Corinthians. Moreover, He would hold the Corinthians accountable for their thoughtless, self-centred attitudes. In fact, they were already being judged, as some were weak and ill, and some had already died [1 CORINTHIANS 11:29, 30].

It is a sad commentary on our lawless age that anyone would even wonder why God should be offended at His professed people living self-centred lives. Nevertheless, when we fail to recognise the Body of Christ we are compelled to view the church as a socio-political entity composed of individuals governed by elected officials. Thus, we pronounce ourselves to be a democracy, forgetting that we are to be a theocracy. Actually, were we truthful we would be compelled to admit that most churches are an oligarchy rather than a democracy; nevertheless, we pronounce that we are democracies because of our subservience to governmental regulations. Modern Christians “go to church,” but too often we fail to see that we “are the church.”

Many of contemporary churches remind me of West Texas rivers. At flood stage, the Pecos River is half-a-mile wide and ankle deep. Too many contemporary churches are in the same condition. They have great breadth, but no depth. Not wanting to hurt anyone’s feelings, they avoid teaching the truths of God’s Word. Consequently, we are not very different from Israel during the days of the Judges when “everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” Many of our churches are able to gather a crowd, but they fail to develop them into a church. A group met in one building at the same time is not necessarily a church. It is only as the people recognise the presence of Christ and invest themselves in one another that they have hope of becoming a church of Christ the Lord. Christ did not give His life to build an institution. He sought to bring forth a new creation—the Body of Christ.

I suggest that we have lived in semi-darkness so long that our eyes have grown accustomed to the light. Instead of recognising Christ among us, we go to church to “meet” God. Therefore, “church” is reduced to just another activity that, however must we may avow its importance, is readily jettisoned if a better offer arises. I have witnessed, and you also have witnessed, congregations that were highly organised, but there was no spiritual life. Participants in the weekly activities moved with ease through the routine—but it was a routine. Woe to us when we are no longer a mystery to the world. When we can be explained, we have ceased to be the holy Bride of Christ and we are in danger of being counted as dead.

There was a day when children learned the catechism that taught the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever. Moreover, this truth was not a mere memory project, but it was integral to the ministry of pulpits. Ministries were built around this righteous concept. Now, the lie that man's chief end is to enjoy himself has supplanted this divine truth.

Consequently, we see the horrifying effort to transform the worship of God into that which makes us feel good. Little do those engaged in this pursuit realise that it is impossible to enjoy ourselves, or even to feel good about ourselves, until we discover how to glorify God.

Contemporary Christians are engaged in a futile pursuit of an ephemeral phantom when they seek to feel good about themselves instead of seeking to find and do the will of God. So, they neither glorify God nor enjoy Him, and they are miserable about their own condition.

To focus more particularly on the subject of the Lord's Table, though many—dare I say “most”—professed Christians imagine that the observance is about them and about how they feel, the Corinthians were rebuked because they had forgotten that the ordinance was to focus their attention on Christ. Focused on the Saviour, they would of necessity see clearly their mutual responsibility to one another. Failing to recognise the Body of Christ, they were incapable of seeing Christ Himself. Failing to show respect for the Bride of Christ, they disrespected the Saviour Himself. When Paul urges these Corinthians to examine themselves [see **1 CORINTHIANS 11:28**], he is challenging them to review their actions, testing whether their actions toward fellow worshippers honour Christ.

In a similar manner, we are in desperate need to again seeing that the Lord's Supper is not a private worship that incidentally is conducted in the presence of others, but that it is a corporate act in which we are compelled to put into practise love for one another. The Lord's Supper is an eminently practical act of worship in which the congregation, covenanted together to worship, strengthen one another in the Faith. To reduce the Meal to a private act is to empty it of meaning, draining it of the power that could otherwise bind us in love.

We must test our own actions, and not merely at the time we observe the Meal. The Lord's Supper is but the culmination of respectful service to one another as the Body of Christ. The Table is the zenith of our Christian trajectory because we have strengthened one another, encouraged one another and consoled one another. If we have focused exclusively, even primarily, on our own wants during the days preceding this observance, we will find that we cannot truly worship. If, however, our focus has been on building the Body of Christ, the Communion Meal will reflect our joy in having fulfilled the will of the Saviour.

There is a second question concerning the consequences of incurring God's displeasure. The topic will be the focus of a future message, but it is sufficient to say that discipline is severe for the self-serving saint. Paul noted that many among the Corinthians were “weak and ill,” and “some [had even] died” [**1 CORINTHIANS 11:30**]. In other words, God held the people accountable, and those so judged were ignorant of why they were suffering as they did. These Corinthians had provoked the Lord to jealousy, thinking they were stronger than He [see **1 CORINTHIANS 10:22**].

God still disciplines His self-centred children. He does this because He loves us too much to ignore our wilful walk. In fact, the point is clearly made when we read, “When we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world” [**1 CORINTHIANS 11:32**]. More Christians are injured because they are determined to do what they want when they want instead of seeking the will of the Master than have ever been injured through satanic assaults. The devil does not get into churches; Christians do their own thing and destroy churches. God cannot ignore sin, and so He holds His people to account for their own actions. He does this for their own good, so that they will not be judged along with the world.

**CURE FOR THE SIN** — The cure for the sin described is to find the will of God and do it. In the case of the Lord's Supper, the cure revolves around ensuring that Christ is central to the worship. If He is central, we will share our lives and our gifts with one another, endeavouring to build the Body and thus to glorify His Name. The cure is not to cease observing the Meal, but to correct the abuses perpetuated through our failure to see the Meal for the apex of worship as it truly is. The cure is to bring our conduct into line with the will of God. Consequently, this prescribed sharing does not refer solely to the Love Feast that is associated with the Meal nor with the Meal itself. Sharing is expected for the whole of our service.

Christians are rightly expected to live out the concept that they are the Family of God. They are to "love one another with brotherly affection," and "outdo one another in showing honour" [ROMANS 12:10]. We are to "comfort one another," and we are to "agree with one another" [2 CORINTHIANS 13:11]. Additionally, we are to "serve one another" [GALATIANS 5:13]. We do this through bearing one another's burdens [GALATIANS 6:2], through being kind to one another, forgiving one another [EPHESIANS 4:32], and submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ [EPHESIANS 5:21].

When we have learned the apostolic admonition, "Do nothing from rivalry or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves" [PHILIPPIANS 2:3], we will then be well on the way to curing the sin of living at the centre of our own little universe. Then, we will begin to build one another in love, exercising our spiritual gifts as God intended them to be used to make one another strong in every way. Then, we will truly encourage one another and console one another instead of living as though others did not exist.

If we fail to consider our fellow Christians who share the Faith with us, there is but one warning left for us: "Prepare to meet your God" [see AMOS 4:12]. However, if pleasing God becomes central to how we conduct our lives, we will find that our fellow worshippers are built up, Christ is glorified, and the Body of Christ is made strong and the church becomes vibrant. That is a goal worthy of His Name.

Is it possible that the reason we require such a reminder is that we have forgotten the price paid for our salvation? May I remind you that as Christians we are taught to "have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though He was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" [PHILIPPIANS 2:5-8].

Knowing that He has sacrificed Himself because of our weakness, we must determine that we will live to honour Him in all things, beginning with the way we view His church—the Body of Christ. Let each one who has been born from above determine to honour Him through investing his life or her life in others to the glory of God. For all who are somehow yet outside of the love of God, consider this call to life in the Beloved Son of God. The Word of God offers, "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved." The passage concludes by testifying that "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved" [ROMANS 10:9, 10, 13].

May God grant repentance that results in life to each one whom He has predestined to life. May He encourage each one called by His Name to live for His glory. Amen.