

# COME TOGETHER FOR THE BETTER

## INTRODUCTION

The Scriptures are a tremendous blessing to us, the very Word of God, God's own speech in written form. They address every single issue that we must deal with in life, whether by direct teaching, or by the establishment of principles.

Among the various kinds of Scripture – the genres of Scripture – are letters from the apostles, not just to the church in general, but to specific churches as well. Those letters usually have characteristics to them. For instance, the letter to the Philippians was a largely encouraging letter; the letter to the Galatians deals mainly with the issue of changing the Gospel. And then there is the First letter to the Corinthians. The Lord Jesus gave these words by the Holy Spirit through the apostle Paul, and did so to provide a correction for almost every error a church can commit.

As the letter goes on, Paul comes to the issue of the Lord's supper. Let's read what he says in the entire passage, and then we'll just look at the first couple of verses.

### **1 Corinthians 11:17–34 2016 ESV**

But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, 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. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not. For I

received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread, 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. 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. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another— if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for judgment. About the other things I will give directions when I come.

Let's pray!

## FOR BETTER OR WORSE?

As is true for much of this letter, Paul begins with a rebuke.

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The outcome of the gathering of the Corinthian church – and for every church, for that matter – should be “for the better.” That should be our aim when we gather for Sunday worship and teaching, for Bible studies, for fellowship and meals. We should always be gathering for the better.

Now, the Corinthian church was immature and worldly in many areas.

They were divided; more than divided – they were splintered and fractured ([First Corinthians 1:10-17](#)). He mentions their divisions in 11:18-19 as well, and says that their divisions have at least revealed those who were truly faithful to the Lord and His Word; as far gone as they were, they were not completely out of bounds.

- But they were filled with jealousy and strife ([First Corinthians 3:3](#)).
- They were proud of themselves ([First Corinthians 4:8](#)).
- They tolerated sin that even Gentiles rejected ([First Corinthians 5:1-2](#)).
- They sued each other in Roman courts ([First Corinthians 6:9-20](#)).
- They were also divided on the issues of marriage and celibacy, and divorce was common among them ([First Corinthians 7:1-24](#)).
- While ignoring terrible sin, they argued about what food was permissible to eat ([First Corinthians 8:1-13](#)).
- They criticized those who made their living from the Gospel ([First Corinthians 9:1-27](#)).
- They flirted with idolatry ([First Corinthians 10:1-22](#)).
- They blurred the distinctions between men and women ([First Corinthians 11:1-16](#)).
- And, as we see in [First Corinthians 11:17-34](#), they redefined and abused and distorted the Lord’s table.

So, Paul was not exaggerating, was he? They did not gather for the better, but for the worse. The gathering of the saints should be a blessing, a time to be taught and encouraged in the Word, a time for fellowship in worship and prayer, a time of blessing one another. But no one benefited from the Corinthian gatherings. No one went home encouraged in the Lord and stronger in their faith.

That doesn't mean that they didn't enjoy their services; I'm sure many did. After all, they had designed a service that suited them personally, their desire for recognition and affirmation, their consumer-mindset, their delight in eloquent speech, their fascination with spiritual gifts, especially the flamboyant spiritual gifts. Sinning Christians didn't fear being corrected or confronted.

But the Word is true: they did not gather for the better, but for the worse, no matter how much they might have enjoyed themselves.

Let me just say that while I'd like to be able to tell you that the Corinthians learned and repented, that wouldn't be true. About 40 years after this letter a pastor in Rome named Clement wrote to the church in Corinth, rebuked them for their worldliness, and even urged them to go back and read what Paul had written. Sadly, they were still gathering for the worse.

## GATHER FOR THE BETTER

Every church should gather for the better. What does that mean? The New Testament lists a number of "one another" statements, descriptions of what a healthy, mature, godly church looks like and acts like.

**We are to love one another,**

- forgiving each other,

- having compassion for one another,
- and praying for one another.

**We are to be at peace with one another,**

- accepting one another,
- being humble with one another,
- being kind to one another,
- being like-minded with one another,
- greeting (welcoming) one another,
- honoring and living in harmony with one another,
- and submitting to one another.

**We are to serve one another,**

- doing good
- and having equal concern for one another.

**And we are to encourage one another.**

- We sometime do need to admonish one another, and spur one another on to good deeds.
- But we are also to be patient and sympathetic to one another,
- bearing with one another in love,
- building one another up.
- We need to confess to one another,
- but never judge or lie to one another,

- or pay back wrong to one another,
- or provoke or slander one another.

The words “one another” appear dozens of times in the epistles. Here’s two things to consider about “one another”:

**First, the church is not a service organization, providing a one-way stream of benefits.** The Norfolk Rescue Mission does that. They provide services for those in need. If you need food, or clothing, or even something for your house – a car seat, a toaster, a coffee mug, towels – you can probably find it at the Mission. All that is required is that you attend a chapel service, and get a slip signed by a staff member.

But the Rescue Mission is not the church. Our service today is not a chapel service where you come simply to receive whatever it is we are giving away. That’s fine for the Rescue Mission, but for the church, that would be gathering “for the worst.”

We gather not just to receive, but to give; not just to be blessed, but to bless; not just to be encouraged, but to encourage.

All of us in the church need all of us in the church, not just to attend, not just to be here to receive, but also to serve as the Lord has gifted each one, and to live the one another together. That’s coming together for the better.

**And second, it is not the job of “The Church” or the Pastor to distribute what people need or want.** The church should not be like the feeding of the 5,000, where the majority passively receive. It should be like the early church following Pentecost, where those who had something shared it with those who didn’t.

The church is called the Body of Christ because, while there are many differences among us, we have the important thing in common: we belong to the Lord Jesus. We are many members, but one Body.

**1 Corinthians 12:12-13 2016 ESV**

For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

All of us need all of us.

Coming together for the better means coming together in love, in service, in unity, recognizing that the Father has chosen us in His Son, that the Son has given His life to us, and that the Spirit empowers and enables each us to do his or her part. Jesus said that it was better for us that He ascended to heaven, because then the Holy Spirit would come. The Spirit didn't come for our private blessing and enjoyment, but for our mutual blessing and encouragement. He does through us what Jesus would do for us if He were with us.

No wonder Paul was so disturbed by the Corinthian church. Their gatherings were not celebrations of Jesus Christ and His Gospel, but the opposite. They clung to their worldliness and sin, they clung to their selfish-ness and ambition, they came to receive and never give, they came to be entertained and not blessed.

Let's make sure that we aren't being the Corinthians. Let's gather for the better. Let's make sure that we are mutual in our hopes – giving as well as receiving, blessing as well as being blessed, encouraging as well as being encouraged.

All of us need all of us.

## THE GOSPEL

Before we go to the Lord's table, let me speak to those who may not be Christians, and let me remind those who do know Christ of what the Gospel is.

No one is a Christian because they were raised to be Christian. No one is a Christian because they were raised in church. No one is a Christian because they were baptized or confirmed or went to youth camp, or because someone else did something for them. There is only one way to become a Christian, and that is to be born again by the Holy Spirit. That is something the Holy Spirit does, according to the will of God the Father, and according to the death and resurrection of God the Son. Salvation can be received as a gift, but it cannot be earned.

If you are without Christ this morning, then I urge you to recognize the truth of the Gospel. You are a sinner, and you are facing the eternal judgment of God. You can't live a life so good that you will go to heaven. There is only one way to be forgiven and brought into a pure, eternal relationship with your Creator, and that is through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. God loved the world in this way: He gave His only begotten Son, so that those believing in Him will not perish but have eternal life. [Ecclesiastes 11:3](#) says, "if a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where the tree falls, there it will lie." If you die without Jesus Christ, you will be without Him for all eternity. For the sake of God's glory, and for the sake of your own soul, believe the Gospel!

## THE LORD'S TABLE

[First Corinthians 11:28](#) says that we are to examine ourselves, and then eat the bread and drink the cup. I don't know your heart and mind, but the Spirit of God does. I'm sure that He has been teaching you as I have spoken this morning. If you



find that you have been coming for the worse, and not for the better, then confess that sin to Him, and be forgiven. Set your heart and mind on obeying the Lord in faith. Commit yourself to your family in Christ. Don't let the devil convince you that you have nothing to give; don't let your pride convince you that you have everything you need.

These simple elements – the bread and the cup – are the reason we have hope. Jesus' body was given for those who believe. Jesus' blood was shed for those who believe. There is nothing magic about the bread and the cup. Eating the bread and drinking the cup is a picture of faith, of taking in all that Jesus is and did for us, of believing to the depth of our being.