

1Corinthians 18-07-29a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services at Grace and Truth Bible Church. It is always a blessing to see the assembled crowd here and to know that those of you that are joining us at a distance are upright and conscious and ready to share with us in the worship of God through the Lord Jesus Christ and through the study of His Word, fellowship of believers of like mind and an opportunity to use our time. If you ever felt like there was a lot of pressure and a lot of things that you ought to be doing, but at a certain point there's nothing else you can be doing.

It's late and you're in bed and you say, well, whatever the pressures are, there's nothing I can do about it right now. I have a rest, but I'm in the only place I can be and everything else will just have to be on hold. I couldn't do it right now if I wanted to.

It's dark, it's raining, whatever it may be. There's an element of comfort in knowing that you're okay right where you are doing right what you're doing and that all of these other things have to wait and it's almost out of your hands. That's the way I feel in Bible class.

There's no other place we should be. There's nothing else we ought to be doing. We're in the right place at the right time doing the right thing and there's a great satisfaction in that.

It is a refreshment. It's like visiting an oasis in a desert populated by bandits and thieves, it seems to me sometimes. This is a great time of fellowship and encouragement from God's Word.

We're going to be returning to our study in 1 Corinthians this morning. We're picking up in chapter 10 and 11 and we'll do a quick run-up to our study this morning, which is going to address one of the more interesting traditional observances in the normal local church, which is the celebration of the Lord's Table, communion as it is called. It is a remembrance that the Lord Jesus spoke of and instituted on the night that he was betrayed.

And Paul brings it up here to the Corinthians in the context of what he has been talking about over the last two or three chapters. And it is essential, as with most things, to recognize the context. Why is the subject addressed? What is its part in the message? What is it that Paul is speaking to? What issue is he teaching about? It's always a good question to ask when we're trying to properly understand the Scriptures, rightly divide the Word of Truth.

So we'll take a moment to go to the Lord in prayer, ask his blessing on our study and on our hearts and minds as we endeavor to tackle this particular section of his Word, and then we'll begin. Father, we are so grateful for all of your many provisions and expressions of grace toward us in this time, enabling us to function in this life, not just adequately, but toward a purpose and with a mission and a goal in mind. We pray that as we look at this portion of your Word together, your Holy Spirit will bless it to each heart, help us to understand it clearly, to see its pertinence and its applicability, and most of all, that as we go forward from this hour, that

we can more fully reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus, which is in turn a reflection of your own eternal glory.

We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. Well, let's take just a moment to look at what we just covered, and I won't call it a review because it's not going to be long enough to qualify as a review.

It's more of a reminder. Chapter 10, verse 24 is a thematic statement for this section, isn't it? Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being. Rather than seeking our own, seek the well-being of others.

That's really been the uniting concept behind everything that he's been talking about. Why should you not go to idol temples? That is a place of demon worship, and you going there is a confusion to others. Even if you don't worship the idol, you're just going there for the food and the fellowship.

It is for two aspects related to others that you don't go. On the other hand, if you're invited to someone's home, or if you buy food for your own home, he says, ask no questions for conscience sake. It's not a matter of conscience in this case, unless someone makes it that by asking a question.

But again, this teaches into a basic problem in the Corinthian church, and it's a basic problem in our society, our culture today. Some of these are cultural. We saw last time this whole issue of praying and prophesying, and what about the is all of that mean? But I'm going to give you four concepts, four nouns.

Two of them are what the Corinthians were embracing and applying. Two of them are what Paul embraces and applies. They are all a part of the Christian life, but if they are not in balance, error and shame are the result.

The Corinthians, and I could give you the context and the nouns in their place in Greek and so on, but here's what the Corinthians are focused on. This is what they are hugging to their spiritual breast and making their application from. Two concepts, two words.

One of them is knowledge. They know some things. They've been taught some things.

They have some conceptual information that has been passed along to them by this very Apostle Paul. You and I have knowledge of the Word of God, hopefully above average level of knowledge. We endeavor to know.

We endeavor to learn and to plumb the depths of the treasures that Scripture has to offer. Knowledge, gnosis. They are enamored with that.

They are impressed with it, and they are running with it. The second is exousia, authority. I have the right to choose.

I have the authority based on the Word of God to do things. I am able to do what I like. There is freedom in Christ.

I can make choices. I can interpret as I see fit. I can choose the theological persuasion as I see fit.

These things are true. Is there important knowledge in the Word of God? Yes. Is there authority based on that knowledge for making choices? Absolutely.

We can choose things that traditions wouldn't hold with. The Gentiles can choose not to be circumcised. That's a Jewish custom that they are not under.

They know they're not under it, and they have authority in the church age to not submit to those who tell them they need to be circumcised. They have knowledge and authority over themselves to not observe the feasts, to not follow the dietary restrictions that God placed on national Israel in the Old Testament. It's a combination of knowledge and authority over their own lives to choose.

Exousia doesn't always mean power in the sense of ruling authority. Sometimes it means your own ruling authority over yourself. You're captain of your ship.

You're master of your fate. You decide. You choose.

And there is this sort of personal power. Exousia is one of the five Greek words translated power, along with kratos and iskeros and a lot of others. It's translated power.

I always think of that Chantix commercial. I've mentioned it before where they say, you know, the power to calm, the power to quit. Then they had to change it because it doesn't actually give you the power to quit.

It gives you the potential to quit, but it doesn't give you power to quit. You still have exousia, and you can still pick up a pack of cigarettes, and you can take Chantix one hour and be smoking a pack the next. But personal power is often what exousia represents, and we're going to see that as we conclude our look at this most recent section.

So this is the Corinthian mantra. They have written this back to Paul in a letter, and they've said, we have knowledge. We know.

We remember what you've taught us. And Paul says, yes, I know you remember what I taught you. You remember the traditions.

And I'm real pleased with that. I praise you for remembering me. This is what they said at the beginning of their letter, probably, at the beginning of our section here.

They're sort of quoting him. You remember we started in chapter 11, verse 2. I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep their traditions just as I deliver them to

you. This is evidently a little bit tongue-in-cheek because he has spent the first ten chapters saying, you don't really remember what I taught you.

But they claim that they did. In their letter they said, oh, Paul, you know, you're such a great guy. We thank you for founding our church and sticking around here for nearly three years and teaching us so many things.

We remember everything you said. But here's where we think, you know, some changes need to be made. So Paul, with a bit of irony here, or not quite sarcasm, but certainly some reservation, I think, says, I praise you that you do remember me in all things.

But the tone of the letter is, here's all of the things where you don't really understand what I taught you. But they're going on gnosis, they're going on knowledge, and they're going on the authority that they feel they have based on that knowledge to choose to do and be certain things. One of them was, well, we know that an idol is nothing.

So we are free to choose to go up and eat at the idol restaurant, which is basically a big house of demon worship, because we're free and because we know and we're okay with that. Remember that? In the most recent section now, they have women who, because of their knowledge that we're no longer under the very demonstrably patriarchal system of the Jews, where the men make all the decisions, the elders are all males, the leaders are all males. When Miriam tried to upset that apple cart, she got leprosy for her trouble.

When there is a woman in charge, it is a rebuke to Israel. Deborah has to be raised up in the days of the judges because the men are also weak, they can't do anything, and God rebukes them by raising up a woman. But the model in Old Testament Israel is patriarchal.

But in the church, there is a newfound oneness in Christ. There is neither male nor female. There is neither Jew nor Greek.

There is neither slave nor free. When it comes to spiritual things, everyone has this new level of exousia that is right and proper and based on knowledge that the dispensation has turned. But this has created problems because the knowledge and the choosing authority that comes out of it is being exercised minus two things that Paul is going to emphasize.

So on the Corinthian side, what have we got? Knowledge and authority to choose, the power to choose, right? Paul says what you're leaving out is two other things. Yes, you have freedom. This is Eleutheria in Greek.

You've got gnosis and exousia over here on the Corinthian side. Paul is using two other words. One is Eleutheria.

I am free. We are free. And the Corinthians are going to say, oh yeah, see, that's what I'm talking about.

I've got knowledge and I've got power to choose and I'm free to choose whatever I want. Paul says you do have freedom and I don't want anybody judging me for my freedom. But the key word here is I have also along with freedom, I have love, agape, and this is looking out for the interests of others.

And although I do have knowledge, although I do have the power to choose and I have the freedom to exercise that choice and pursue that knowledge, all of that has to come under the umbrella of agape, which is sensitivity to and priority for the needs of others. And if you exercise, if you pursue knowledge at the expense of others, if you exercise your power to choose at someone else's expense, if you flaunt your freedom and it causes others to stumble, you have violated that final and most important concept, which is love. And of course, we're not far away from 1 Corinthians chapter 13.

And you remember what that is, right? What's 1 Corinthians 13? It's the something chapter. What is it? It's the love chapter. He's going to spend an entire chapter talking about this concept.

These sections that we're studying now are leading up to that. And he's explaining knowledge is a wonderful thing. Your power to choose, your expression of free will is a wonderful thing.

And you've got freedom in Christ to do it. But all three of those must be subordinate to the highest and greatest. What did Jesus say were the two summary commandments that sum up all of the law and the prophets? To express some particular thing toward God and some particular thing toward one another, what was it? Love.

Love the Lord your God, love your neighbor. If Jesus says all the law and the prophets are summed up in these, Paul is returning to that same theme. You can't do these other things and ignore love.

Love is the context in which these other things have to function. And love is sacrificial toward self and beneficial toward others at its core. At its expression level, that's what it is.

It is sensitivity to the needs and the benefits of others. And he gives that in two nouns in verse 23 of chapter 10. All things are lawful.

Now, for something to be lawful, you've got to know what the law is. That's you can choose to function under the law, and that's your personal authority, your exousia, and you have freedom because all things are lawful. But verse 23, all things are not helpful.

All things are lawful, knowledge, authority, and freedom. But not all things build up. Build up others.

Benefit others. And those two concepts are the outcome of properly expressed love. When love is functioning, others are edified.

When love is functioning, others are helped. They're benefited. There's benefit and there's building.

If you want to know if love is functioning in your life, are those around you being benefited by you being there, or are they being oppressed? Are they being drawn toward the cross, drawn toward Christ, drawn toward the Father? Is your light so shining that they see you and glorify your Father? Or are you a stumbling block and an impediment and a source of confusion? Does your presence build up? Is it positive in a spiritual sense? That's when you are fulfilling the great commandment to love one another. So this is the theme. This is the core, and everything is like the spokes of a wagon wheel coming back to this hub, and it is essential.

Let me say again. Look deeply into my eyes. It is essential to remember this theme.

We have seen it from 1-1 all the way to the present time. This is the guiding theme around which all of the material in Corinthians is organized. That's why it's here.

Paul is saying, you all have taken your knowledge and your power to choose and your freedom, and you're working those, but you're missing this essential overarching guiding principle. Everything is under that. Now, think about what we covered last time.

Remember the head covering deal? Same thing. So we're a little fuzzy on the cultural details. What exactly did it mean to cover the head, to pray and prophesy? Is this a literal head covering? Is it some other expression of recognition of authority? Here's the upshot of all of it.

The reason we don't know some of those details is we don't need to know. What we need to know is in the passage and transcends the culture, and what is it? If the head of every man is Christ, if the head of the woman is the man, and the head of Christ is God, then there is a looking to, the responsibility to that head. If someone is the head, and it's interesting, I did some research on kephale, K-E-P-H-A-L-E, which is the Greek word translated head here.

It's a funny thing because it's Rosh in Hebrew. And when you're talking about the physical head or the head and the tail and that sort of thing, the Septuagint translators would translate Rosh with kephale in the sense of sort of a physical manifestation of headship. But when it comes to, we talk about the federal head or he's the head of the organization or something like that, that's a rare, very uncommon use of kephale.

And yet many traditional interpretations of this thing say, well, the authority over the man is Christ and the authority over the woman is the man. But kephale is used, and it's interesting that that's not really what Greeks got out of that word. They didn't get he's the boss.

Christ is the boss of the man. The man is the boss of the woman. And the woman says, you are the boss of me.

And the man says to Christ, you are the boss of me. And Jesus says to God, the Father, you are the boss of me. That's not how they saw kephale.

They saw it more, and unusually for us, since we don't use the word in this way, they saw it more in terms of source, of origin, of where you came from. And you honor your parents, not because they've got ruling authority, but that's where you came from. Those are your people.

That's why you exist. And you can see how it makes sense of Paul's argument. I wasn't quite satisfied with my understanding of it last week, and since I did this little additional digging.

But when Paul says, you know, the man didn't come from the woman. The woman came from the man. Well, he's justifying, I think, the use of this word *kephale*.

And you say, well, the man came from Christ. Is this Paul talking about Christ as the originator in creation, all things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made? I think there is a look in that direction, maybe. But I think, more importantly, it is the spiritual sense.

The man, in the sense of representing mankind the way Adam represents the human race, we only exist as a spiritual creation because of Christ. And, of course, the woman has just as much owed to the Lord Jesus for her spiritual birth as the man does. But Paul's not pressing the analogy, I don't think.

What he's basically saying is, the man doesn't look to the woman. And, you know, a man, with all due respect to mothers, you know, you don't look to your mother for your guiding principle, even though she's the one that gave birth to you. The man, spiritually speaking, looks to Christ.

That's where you get your guidance. And he's your source. He's your Savior.

He's the one through whom eternal life came. And so the man, in his responsibility for his household, and his family, and the operation of everything that he is over, looks to Christ. The woman, of course, looks to Christ, but she looks through her husband.

Because it's, you know, back to the enlisted officer thing, it's not so much because he has been granted authority, but this is the arena in which God has given her expression for honoring Christ. She honors Christ by honoring her husband. The husband honors Christ by honoring Christ.

And through Christ, you honor God the Father. Jesus said, I'm the way to the Father. You come to the Father through me.

And so when Paul says, you know, the head, the source of Christ is God, what he's saying is, when the man honors Christ, he's honoring God the Father. When the woman honors her husband, she's honoring Christ, and the honor flows, in all cases, all the way up to the Father. There's just an extra link in the chain, and an often very insufficient one with the husband.

But it's God's order. But it's an order more of source than of, here's your hammer, swing it, and make everybody submit. So that being said, we're back to the issue that Paul brings up, which is

odd in this letter.

Most of his arguments and his passion is for important theological truths. You can't be tangled up in demon worship. You've got to focus on what is important.

Love is the guiding theme, the benefit of others and edifying others. So what about this head thing? Why does it come up? Because it seems to be all custom, and Paul doesn't have quite the pizzazz in an argument on this level that he's going to have coming up in the next. Because it is another illustration of the very same thing.

Why would the woman ensure that whatever the head covering involves, she doesn't shame the man? There's either a father or a husband in view here. When this woman prays or prophesies, in some way, whatever she's doing with head covering or hair, there is discredit brought on some man who is either her father or her husband, or perhaps her betrothed. But something she's doing when she prays and prophesies that has to do with this head covering dishonors her head in the sense of man.

In the same way that if a man hangs his head, or it doesn't actually say cover, it says his head is down, but it's used in other places to talk about a head covering. So something about the man praying and prophesying with his head covered in a submissive pose dishonors Christ. We don't know exactly how this worked.

I did some more work on the tefillim and the prayer shawl, but a lot of that is in later Judaism, actually even after the time of Christ, and there's no evidence that that pertained in Christ's day or in Paul's day, movies notwithstanding. But we don't need to know. All we need to know is something the woman is doing in praying and prophesying in the church is discrediting her head, i.e., the man.

And something the man is doing that is opposite of that is discrediting Christ. But the focus in the passage is the woman, isn't it? He doesn't really say, now, you men, you've got to stop praying with your head covered. He says you women need to ensure that you are honoring the man in your life when you are functioning in a communication way in the church.

And women do communicate in the church. It's vertical and horizontal, right? She's praying vertically, and everybody can hear it. So she's offering a public vocal prayer in the church.

She's speaking in church. When she is prophesying, that's horizontal communication. She is standing up and communicating the Word of God vocally in a church setting.

Paul doesn't say, what are you doing praying and prophesying in church? I will not suffer a woman to speak in church. Shut up and ask your husband at home. Does he? He says, when you do it, you have to ensure that you are not shaming the man in your life by the way you do it.

And in the culture, in the custom, in the tradition, something with head coverings was

supposed to be different for women than it was for men. Men were supposed to look like men praying and prophesying. Women were supposed to look like women praying and prophesying.

And the allusion to hair indicates that there is some expression of femininity and recognition that she is the woman and that there is an extra link between her and Christ and God the Father in the form of the man that she acknowledges in some customary or traditional way. In a modern culture, it might be a wedding ring. It might be some deference, some picture, some acknowledgment that there is a man that God has placed in a source mode for me.

He's the source of my provision. He's the source of my guidance. He's the source of something.

Not so much hammer-wielding authority, but the idea of source, that things are flowing from God through Christ through the man to the woman. They are flowing from God through Christ to the man, and he is accountable and responsible to be sure that everybody under his purview gets what they're supposed to get from God. So you see that? But all of this is conditioned now because it's aimed at the woman.

There's no getting around it. When you look at this section we just covered, it's addressing a problem in the Corinthian church with the way the women, some of the women, were praying and they were dishonoring men in the church. And Paul says, you shouldn't do that now.

They say, wait a minute, we've got, remember the three things? Unlike Jewish tradition and Jewish culture, we have the knowledge that women do have communication gifts in the church, and they can pray and they can prophesy. More about the gifts in a minute. But we know this, and we can choose to exercise it in the church because we have freedom to do it, freedom in Christ, neither male nor female, right? What is it that they are missing when they're doing this and praying and prophesying with their head uncovered? What's the real problem? What's the fourth thing? They are not thinking about the honor and the glory that they are supposed to reflect for the man.

The benefit and the building up of the man is out. This is in some way self-glorifying and self-edifying. And Paul's going to talk more about the function of tongues, where you're edifying yourself but not others.

It's all of a piece. It's all of a theme here. So the basic problem, and regardless, it transcends the custom and the tradition and whatever this thing was that was or wasn't on the head, but there is a distinction that should be maintained between men and women, and it is a function of love for the woman to be sensitive to what her behavior reflects in terms of her source man, her father or her husband.

What she does reflects. The man doesn't worry as much about whether his behavior and his conduct and whatever else reflects on his wife as he should be worried about how it reflects on Christ. When the woman is concerned about her behavior reflecting on her husband, she knows that the husband in turn is reflecting the glory of Christ and she is doing it for Christ.

It is love for Christ and love for her husband. The husband has love for the Lord Jesus Christ as well as love for his wife, but it is flowing up toward God the Father. Does that make sense? That's what the head covering thing is all about.

The missing element, as with meat offered to idols, as with going up to the temple, as with what we're about to see in chapter 11, and this is so essential that we understand it as we go into this part of chapter 11, the fundamental problem that Paul is addressing is knowledge and authority to choose and freedom have carried the Corinthians in a direction where they left love back at the bus stop. It's like leaving your suitcase at the airport. They've gone on with these other three things, but the most important guiding principle, the compass and the governor over the exercise of those is missing.

And so their knowledge and their freedom and their power to choose is running amok at the expense of others. Others are suffering. Men are being disrespected and shamed, which in turn disrespects and shames Christ.

It's not just, oh, poor men, you need to prop them up and build them up. When you disrespect the man, you disrespect Christ, and it flows right up the chain to God the Father, because God the Father is the one who ordained this, who set it up, who gave you the opportunity to reflect this glory. And when you disregard it, and if you're not looking out for the interests of others, whose interests are you looking out for? The model is Jesus Christ.

Remember Philippians chapter 2? Looking out not only for our own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who emptied himself, took on the form of a servant, came in the likeness of men. Did he know that he was God the Son? Did he know that he was equal and eternal with the Father and the Spirit? Why would he empty himself? Why would he take on the form of a man, humble himself and be obedient to death, even the death of the cross? Did knowledge tell him that was a good thing to do? Did he have freedom to choose? And did he have a chooser itself, the authority to make his own choices? He did.

You can see that in the Gethsemane prayer. But what was the principle that took Christ to the cross? Love for his Father and love for us. That's the missing element in Corinth in each of these situations.

Now if you keep that firmly in mind, take a look at the next section. We're going to read it, we'll go to the break, and then we'll study it. Chapter 11.

Imitate me just as I also do Christ. Imitate in what sense? This is not, you know, vocal peculiarities or mannerisms. This is in the area of love.

I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you. But I want you to know that the head of every man, and that's where he began the head section. Remember that? We went all the way through chapter 11 and came

down to verse 16.

If anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God. He begins and ends with this idea of a tradition and a custom. And it's rare for Paul to argue on the basis of tradition or custom.

In fact, he often militates against that, teaching his doctrines, the traditions of men, and so on. But the principle is seeking the good of others. We saw this clear back in chapter 6, verse 12, where he first sort of brought this to a head.

You remember that? All things are lawful, but not all things build up. All things are lawful, but I will not be controlled by any. And to be controlled by them is to miss their benefit to others.

Not all things are helpful. He has the same thing, by the way, in Romans chapter 15, verses 1 through 3. If you flip back just a few pages to the end of Romans, it's not like this is unique to the Corinthians. Romans 15, 1, if I can get there, We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

Bear with their scruples. Yield, even though we have freedom, we have authority, we have knowledge. Love tells us to bear with and not please ourselves.

Let each of us please his neighbor for his benefit, leading to building up. Same two concepts we have in our passage. Let each of us please his neighbor, not just please him by being some sort of a sycophantic gift giver or whatever, but for his good, leading to building up.

His benefit and his building up. For even Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, the reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me. There is that link.

Same thing, by the way, in Philippians chapter 2 that I already cited. It's the example of Jesus Christ. He is the one that Paul is imitating, and he says, imitate me because I imitate Christ in this respect.

Then in 1116 here, anyone who wants to be contentious, this particular notion is introduced four times in 1 Corinthians. We have already seen it in chapter 3 verse 18. Flip back there real quick.

Let no one deceive himself if anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, seems to have gnosis in this age. Let him become a fool that he may become wise. Don't just run on wisdom alone, knowledge alone.

That's 3.18. The second place we saw it is chapter 8 verse 2. Concerning things offered to idols, we know that we have knowledge. Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies. Remember that in 8.1? Gnosis by itself, unconstrained, is just going to swell.

It's going to puff. You don't want to see that in your ankles. You don't want to see it in a wound.

It gets puffed up. That's not good. Love edifies.

If anyone thinks that he knows anything, he knows nothing yet as he ought to know. If your knowledge is ungoverned by sensitivity to the benefit and the building up of others, it is just going to swell. It's going to become a sign of problem, not a mark of glory, flowing up through the chain to God the Father.

Then we have it here, and we're going to see it one more time in chapter 14 verse 37. You can flip forward just a page or so. If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord.

If anyone thinks, Gnosis, if anyone has been choosing to do things based on what he thinks, let him think again. Four times in this letter you have this idea, because there are people who are contentious. Paul says, if you're one of the contentious, take heed.

If you're failing to prioritize love over knowledge, over freedom, and over your own self-determination, think again. Go back and revisit your assumptions, because you have the knowledge and you have the freedom to do so. You can change your mind and do better, because you've got free will.

Love is the governing principle, love for others, and through that, love for God Himself. The love that the woman has for the man is really emblematic of the love that all believers should have for one another. It flows through them to Christ, to God the Father, in an unbroken chain.

All right, so he's also going to say here that we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God. And he's going to remind them that they're part of a larger picture. There are other churches, and none of them do this.

This seems to have been an innovation in Corinth, maybe based on what they saw. It was a big center of idol worship, and what the priestesses did up in the idol temples, maybe this was in some way emulating or reflecting what they saw, and there's supposed to be a distinction. There were a lot of women-led idolatrous and pagan God practices in the ancient world, and to look like a priestess, to act like a priestess, to dress like a priestess, or to pray and prophesy in a way that resembled them, was not helpful and did not build up those who were trying to come out of that and come to Christ, and recognize that there is a whole fresh perspective looking through from the woman to the man to Christ to God.

And to in any way fog that picture up doesn't reflect love. And even though, well, am I not free to dress any way I want? You are free. Do you have right to choose? Yes, you do.

And do you know that the way you dress isn't necessarily an issue? It becomes an issue if it's a stumbling block to others, if it interferes with helping them and building them up. That's an overriding consideration. So, then verse 17, in giving instruction, I do not praise you, since you come together, not for the better, but for the worse.

Summing up everything in the first ten and a half chapters here, Paul says, you know, you wrote in your letter how you remember me and everything. Well, in giving these instructions, these instructions that I just gave and what I'm about to give, I do not praise you. Because when you come together, it is not for benefit, but it's opposite.

Your fellowship isn't edifying and beneficial. It is corrosive and destructive. That's what he's saying.

And I can't praise you for that. You'd be better off if you didn't meet, than to get together and cause what you're causing. Four.

First of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And in part, I believe it. This goes all the way back to the beginning of the letter, doesn't it? I am of Paul, I am of Apollos.

But he's saying there are cliques. You've got little groups in the church, and you all get together and, you know, make much of each other. And there's other people over here that are not a part of that and are excluded and sort of cold shouldered.

Remember the origin of the term cold shoulder, give someone the cold shoulder. I always thought it was kind of like, you know, the sun is over here and you're facing the sun and this shoulder is cold. And that's the one you turn towards somebody that's coming up.

But that's not it. In medieval times, if you had a visitor come and you're in the middle of a feast, you don't invite them to sit down at the table and partake of the hot food, you go get a cold shoulder of mutton and hand them that, they sit in the back. It's a cold shoulder of mutton.

So when you give them the cold shoulder, you're saying, well, yeah, you can come in. But you know, you sit over there in the corner and eat this leftover here that's not even hot. A little trivia there, no charge.

When you come together as a church, verse 18, I hear there are divisions among you. And in part, I believe it for there must also be factions among you that those who are approved may be recognized among you. He says, if there's going to be a division in the church, the good kind of division is when you recognize those who are faithful, who are wise, who are humble, and who are characterized by this love that he's been talking about.

You can have a division in the church where you've got those who are mature and they stand out as such. These are the men you select for elders. These are the ones who provide your teaching.

These are the ones who exercise leadership because they are characterized by extraordinary humility, extraordinary love, extraordinary self-control. You see that in Timothy and Titus when he gives the qualifications for an elder. There should be a division, Paul says, so that those who are approved may be recognizable.

By implication, not everybody is approved. There are people who are still on the road to maturity, still working out the kinks. God is not finished with me yet type of thing.

But there should be some recognizable mature believers in your group. And Paul says that's the kind of division that's good. Therefore, verse 20, now we're getting into the meat of it.

When you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's supper. When you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's supper. For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others.

One is hungry, another is drunk. Again, in the early church, in the early, early church, which is what Corinthians represents, you notice the signed gifts are still in full evidence. And I said earlier I would say something about gifts.

There is a progression that you can see even in the New Testament. When Paul at first says, when a woman prays and prophesies, here's how she should do it so that she doesn't dishonor man and through him Christ and through him God. There is a way that she should do it.

It is a later epistle where he says, as these temporary gifts die out and more and more apostolic and pastoral teaching permeates the church, these initial communication gifts of prophesying and praying are dwindling out. And by the time Paul writes, I will not suffer a woman to have exousia over a man, it's more than just exerting hammer-wielding authority, it's making his choices for him, determining the direction in general. And if she has questions, let her ask at home.

This reflects the transition time in the church. Corinthians is early, that is somewhat later. And by that time, there is no need for a woman to stand up in the early church.

Some of the women were more mature than the men in the first days of the church and so God would give them the message to impart because they could do it wisely and properly and benefit the church. As men come to maturity, that dwindles away and it goes back to the elders and their wives. But it is elders who are chosen in the church, not deaconesses or eldresses.

So in explanation, we see that transition. In Corinthians, it's very shortly after Paul begins his apostolic ministry. Corinth is one of the first churches he establishes.

Much later, he's going to write that women no longer need to speak. He doesn't say anything about their heads or coverings or anything else. He says, they can now just be quiet and learn.

And if they've got questions, their man can fill them in at home. And that's now the proper way to express that. The culture changes, the tradition changes, the expression of changes over time.

It has changed in our day. It's not a matter of wearing a hat in church at Easter or any other time. There are other ways to acknowledge and express recognition of God's structure for

sourcing and providing and recognizing the path to God.

But he says, also as a part of that tradition, in the early church, they met for meals. This has almost entirely gone away. I mean, you have the occasional potluck or fellowship dinner or whatever, but every time the church met, it was around the table.

They met at meals. That's why people went to each other's houses. They didn't sit around and play canasta or gather around the piano and sing show tunes.

They had a meal. When you went to somebody's house, you had a meal. So when there was an assembly for church, there was a meal.

Smaller churches like us, we get to do that quite a lot, probably much closer to the early church because we're small and we can do it. As churches get large, it's just impractical. You're going to have to run a soup kitchen every time you have church.

But remember, in the early church, it was a house church like this. There was teaching, spiritual food, and there was physical food every time they met. Unlike social meals, unlike regular meals at the household, unlike inviting somebody else over for a meal for a social occasion, it was the Lord's Supper.

The Lord's Supper is the meal that takes place at the church meeting. I will have all kinds of fire rain down on my head for saying this. That's all it was.

There wasn't a special cup. There wasn't special bread. It was the church meal.

Just like the praying and prophesying for the women in the earliest days, all churches met around a meal. They had a spiritual meal. They had a physical meal.

We don't even know the order of that. We have almost no information about the detailed practices in the early church. We know they met in homes because Paul says, greet these folks and the church that meets in their home.

But because it met in the home, there was a table. Remember, they often reclined. They were on the floor on pillows and such.

There was a low table and they would recline. But they were small enough group that they could do that. They ate a meal every time they met.

From the earliest days, they met on Sunday to honor the Lord's resurrection. They were free from the Saturday. They had the knowledge that Saturday was no longer a Sabbath they had to observe.

It was supposed to be a time to express this mutual benefit, this love. But the Lord's Supper is just the meal at church. That's, in my view, all it meant.

No ritual, no mystique, nothing trying to do what Jesus did in the upper room. Every meal that they had together as a church around worship was the Lord's Supper. It was the Lord's meal.

Lots of things happened in the upper room when the Lord Jesus said, this is the new covenant in my blood. This is my body which is broken for you. There was the foot washing.

There was singing hymns at the end. There was a lot. But I will introduce that concept and let you metaphorically chew on it over the break.

Look at the passage. Watch what's coming up and we'll cover it in the second session. But the overarching theme here used to have a song on the radio when I was a kid, where is the love? Where is the love? That's the question we ask ourselves.

Let's pause and take our break.