

Today is the first Sunday of the month. Many congregations, including ours celebrate the Lord's Supper, or what is known as Communion, on the first Sunday of the month.

Now since I was specifically asked to preach on the two Communion Sundays in July and August I decided to lead us in an examination of that classic passage in 1 Cor. where the apostle Paul deals with the Lord's Supper.

He is writing about it because many in the Corinthian Church were weak and were getting sick and a number had died under God's judgment for abusing this sacrament. So he is reminding them it's the Lord's Supper and it must be handled with care!

Please open your Bibles to 1st Corinthians 11. If you are using a pew Bible this passage is found on page 1113. The cross references I refer to this morning will be on the screens but not the central text.

While you're looking up 1 Cor 11, let me again (as I have often done when teaching) take the opportunity to encourage you to be making time to be in God's Word throughout the week!

"Within the covers of this book we have all the revelation we need to be all that God is asking us to be in all of life's circumstances".

Our lives as Christians will only be transformed by the renewing of our minds and our minds can only be renewed through the Word of God!

- If the only time you are in the Word of God is during this short Sunday morning message time you will not be experiencing the heart transformation that Paul refers to in Romans 12!
- Consequently you will really struggle to discern what God wants you to do - his good, his pleasing, his perfect will for you.

Have you found **1 Corinthians 11** ? I'll read v.17

1 Corinthians 11:17 (NIV)

17 In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good.

When I began to study this passage, the first thing that caught my attention was the word "**directives**".

"Directives" - Gk is *pa-ran-gel-o*.

- a strong word meaning to charge, to order or to command.
- 31 occurrences in NT - KJV uses "command" or "charge" 26x

So Paul is not giving suggestions. Suggestions can be accepted or ignored. Paul is giving directives where the only response is to obey or disobey.

Paul has Apostolic Authority.

I.E. - when he gave directives or commands to a congregation he was speaking with Christ's authority; he was speaking for Christ.

Notice how he puts it in 1 Cor. 14:36-38

Paul has been addressing the question of orderly worship.

- He has written about tongues, prophesying and women speaking in church. It is not my role to interpret this section this morning!

What I want is to draw your attention to is the end of the chapter starting with verse 36 -

- Paul is being sarcastic when he asks these 2 rhetorical questions suggesting that the Corinthians were following their own will rather than conforming to God's word and will

³⁶ Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? ³⁷ If anybody thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. ³⁸ If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored.

Dr. Lowery (Professor at Dallas Seminary) writes "Anyone who [consistently] ignores the Lord's commands [through Paul] would find himself . . . ignored by Him at the last day, because his actions would show that he never knew the Lord

Again we see Paul wasn't making suggestions he was giving directives which they and we are to understand as the Lord's commands - the expected response was obedience.

Notice another passage 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 11-15

Here he is addressing idleness.

6 In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us.

11 We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. 12 Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat. 13 And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right. 14 If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of him. Do not associate with him, in order that he may feel ashamed. 15 Yet do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother.

Note the discipline was meant to be remedial, not overly harsh or punitive.

Does it not seem apparent that the young NT church, organically comprised of the priesthood of Believers, with all the equality that implies, was still functionally structured in a way that obedience and submission to God appointed Apostolic leaders was expected and was in fact normative.

Now we understand there is no defensible argument for Apostolic Succession.

- Church leaders do not speak for God in this sense!
- Any proclamation from the pulpit "Thus saith the Lord !" is only valid when it reflects Scripture that is being correctly interpreted!

But this issuing of directives and commands by the apostolic leaders in the early church raises questions for today - does it not?

- We know we are to submit to and obey the Word of God - our legacy from the teaching of the Apostles - the human agents the Holy Spirit used to fill out the canon of Scripture.
- **But do Pastors and Elders have the authority and the responsibility to issue "directives" as they seek our spiritual good?**

The only way to answer any question like this is to go back to Scripture! What does it reveal? Do Pastors and Elders have the authority and the responsibility to issue "directives" as they seek our

spiritual good? **It appears the answer is yes!!**

For example, we know Timothy was not an Apostle - he was a Pastor.

But notice this verse in 1 Timothy 1: 3 Why was Paul leaving Timothy behind in Ephesus?...

3 As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies... 5 The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

Whose heart? Whose conscience? Whose faith? Paul's and Timothy's! These men were not dictators on a power trip; they loved God's people!! But their management of the church and there shepherding of the flock had an authoritative aspect to it that seems foreign to us - wouldn't you agree!?

Another example Hebrews 13:7, 17 speaking of church leaders

7 Remember your leaders, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith.
17 Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

Of course this raises a number of questions beyond the scope of our time together this morning.

But when was the last time a Pastor or the Elders gave a **directive** that called for your obedience, that required your submission to their authority? Can you remember this ever happening!

- What would your response be if the Elders, out of genuine concern for our spiritual growth, gave a directive that we must all regularly be in either a SS class or home study group!
- Or they gave a directive giving guidelines affecting the Sunday morning participation of our kids in competitive sports? What would your reaction be?

- Hey back off Jack and mind your own business! We don't live under law but under grace!
- Or as my brother used to say to me - Hey, did God die and leave you in charge - if so I must have missed that memo!

Well - It seems to me, without over stating it, that the NT church exhibited a different type relationship between church leaders and the congregation than in many, if not most churches today! They were far more proactive in giving “directives” for the spiritual well-being of the members!

So for the last couple weeks, I've been asking myself -Why is that?

- We have probably pendulum-ated ! (I just made up that word) We have swung like a pendulum in our reaction to legalism and abusive dictatorial leadership? I, for one, have had some bad experiences with that style of leadership.
- But I also wonder if it is in part due to the negative side of the positive aspects of the very celebration of this weekend?

We are celebrating Independence Day.

- We pride ourselves as Americans on our independence, having an independent spirit!
- This may be a good quality when speaking of national independence but when this spirit of independence is carried over into the church and into the home and into marriages it becomes destructive! It is not of the Spirit, it is of the flesh! It is exactly the opposite of the spirit of submission that is indicative of living under the Lordship of Christ - the spirit that is a by-product of being rightly related to God.

Let's move on and look at verses 18 and 19.

18 In the first place, I hear that when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it.
 19 No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval.

Paul had heard reports that there were divisions among the church members in Corinth.

It appears that when the congregation came together for meetings (here Paul is talking about the Love Feast meals that were to end with Communion) they were forming or clustering apparently into groups along socio-economic lines. The wealthier Christians were refusing to sit next to and share their fine food and drink with the poor Christians - some of whom were probably slaves of the well-to-do.

We will consider the Corinthian's behavior at their Love Feasts and the Lord's Supper next Communion Sunday, which will be the 2nd Sunday in Aug.

For now the bottom line is - they were clustering around criteria that five minutes after a person dies will not matter in the least! (according to bank accounts, education, race, social standing, etc.)

This leads us to a very important principles in life!! Since we are all created for eternity, one of the questions you need to regularly ask yourself is "What will be important - what will matter five minutes after I am dead; as you step out of the 80-90yr life on earth foyer into the stadium of the 1st billion years of eternity?" and then work back to the present to determine your priorities! To decide how to live your life - how to spend your time. How to treat people around you!

Now for the time remaining let's focus on verse 19.

19 No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval.

“**differences**” (NIV) is better translated "**factions**" (NASB, RSV, ESV)

- gk - hī-rě-sis - from which we get the English word heresy

In fact the King James version reads (KJV)

19 For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.

The word simply refers to "a choosing or a choice" and not necessarily in a bad sense,

- often simply the idea of people choosing to align with a group that believes and behaves in a

certain way. Ex. - to refer to "the party of the Pharisees' or 'the sect of the Sadducees"

But when it is used in a negative way it means

- rebellion against and lack of submission to rightful authority in what one believes or does.
- Therefore we get the word "heresy" - which means "opinions and doctrines contrary to the true orthodox and authoritative interpretation of Scripture"

Paul is referring to minority factions formed by the willful choosing of one's own way or opinions regardless of and in opposition to **rightful authority**.

- In context that rightful authority would be the teachings and the leadership of the Apostles .
- In our day it is...
 - the authority of the Word of God and of
 - church Elders operating within the boundaries of their God given authority.

Before we answer the question "Why do there have to be factions?" let's take a look at the end phrase "*to show which of you have God's approval*"

Again the NIV translation is weak - It is better translated by the word "**genuine**" as we have it in the following translations:

1 Corinthians 11:19 (RSV and ESV)

19 for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized.

1 Corinthians 11:19 (God's Word Translation)

19 factions have to exist in order to make it clear who the genuine believers among you are.

The word "**genuine**" is *do'-kē-mos*

- means "they have been tried - have stood the test - and are proven genuine"

But why the moral necessity for these factions?

- God was using these factions to make clear (to attest) who the genuine Christians were - those that were approved as authentic by being tested.

How so?

These factions, these groups attract those who have never truly submitted to the Lordship of Christ as evidenced by their unwillingness of submit to...

1. the whole council of God in Scripture and
2. to God ordained church authority.

So today we have whole churches and entire denominations that are comparable to these factions that existed within the church in Corinth.

- They attract those who want Christ on their own terms
- Those who refuse to submit to the teachings in Scripture that challenge their spirit of independence or their commitment to self-determination.

In closing it is this pull of the flesh towards independence,

- this resistance to submission to God, to his Word and to those in rightful authority that we need to examine ourselves concerning.
- This is part of what needs to be correctly evaluated as we approach the Lord's Table.
- As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 11:28 and 30 AMP

28 Let a man [thoroughly] examine himself, and [only when he has done] so should he eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

31 For if we searchingly examined ourselves [detecting our shortcomings and recognizing our own condition], we should not be judged and penalty decreed [by the divine judgment]

LET'S PRAY!