

1 Corinthians 8-12

BRC

Read the Bible. Follow Jesus.

NT #32 Bible Reading Class, Pastor Warren Wang

Big Bear, CA

A Bible Reader's Conviction

- All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and *training in righteousness*, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. (2 Tim. 3:16-17, NIV)

A Spiritual Journey

1. May you read the Word of God with reverence, and walk in His will!
2. May the word of the Lord prosper; May He add to your number those who are being saved!
3. May the Lord bless the days you read His Word!

B R C

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The Guiding Principles of BRC

Christ-Centered

Bible-Based

Mission-Minded

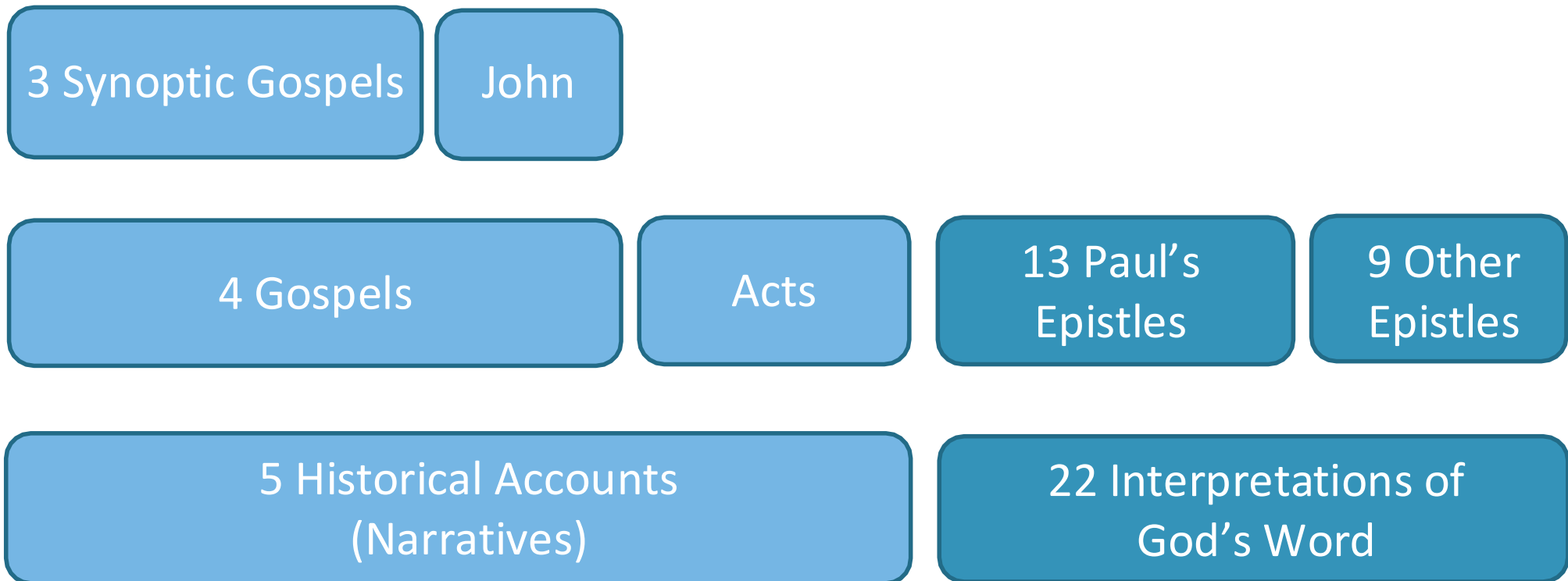
Honor System and Agreement of BRC

1. I'll complete weekly reading assignment

2. I'll watch weekly teaching video in its entirety

3. I'll complete weekly quiz (closed book)

New Testament Structure



About Food Once Sacrificed to Idols: Chapter 8-10

- **What went wrong?**
- During that time, much of the available food had been sacrificed to idols. Some believers who “don’t possess knowledge” believed that idols were real. For them, eating sacrificed food meant worshiping idols. As for those who “possess knowledge”, they knew the idols were false, and there is only one true God. Food was simply food, and they ate it without hesitation. But when someone who “doesn’t possess knowledge” saw brothers eating sacrificed food, he thought it was allowed to worship idols and also ate that food. However, other believers were merely eating food, while he was worshiping idols. Therefore, those who “possess knowledge” might trip those who “don’t possess knowledge”.

About Food Once Sacrificed to Idols

- Now about food sacrificed to idols: We know that “We all possess knowledge.” **But knowledge puffs up while love builds up.** Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know. But whoever loves God is known by God.
- So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that “An idol is nothing at all in the world” and that “**There is no God but one.**” For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”), yet for us there is but one God, the Father, from whom all things came and for whom we live; and there is but one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things came and through whom we live.
- But not everyone possesses this knowledge. Some people are still so accustomed to idols that when they eat sacrificial food they think of it as having been sacrificed to a god, and since **their conscience is weak, it is defiled.** But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do. (8:1-8)

My Freedom Becomes a Stumbling Block to Others

- Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak. For if someone with a weak conscience sees you, with all your knowledge, eating in an idol's temple, won't that person be emboldened to eat what is sacrificed to idols? So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall. (8:9-13)

About Food Once Sacrificed to Idols

- **The cause of the problem**
- This is a very complicated issue which involves three aspects: first is the cognition of the truth; second is consideration of behaviors; third is choice of love.
- 1. **Cognition of truth:** First, Corinthians had a false understanding of the truth. They thought that eating sacrificed food would be attached to the idols. Some believers still hold on to old concepts, lacking new spiritual knowledge. Are idols God? Except for the only God, are there any Gods in heaven and earth? The Corinthians worshiped pagan gods like Apollo, Mars, Demeter, Aphrodite, Are they really God?

About Food Once Sacrificed to Idols

1. Modern people worship gods like Guanyin, Mazu, Guan Gong, Are they really God? If I eat food sacrificed to idols, will I be possessed by the idols? Will I be punished by God? Some believers with knowledge know that idols are false gods, regarding them as air, feel free to eat the food without concerns, no matter whether it was previously sacrificed to the idols. Some believers don't possess this knowledge (**But not everyone possesses this knowledge. 8:7**), and they believe that those idols are also God, in addition to the only true God. They have a false understanding of the essential truth. There wouldn't be any issues if all the Corinthian believers knew that **"So then, about eating food sacrificed to idols: We know that an idol is nothing at all in the world and that there is no God but one."** (8:4), then there would be no problem.

About Food Once Sacrificed to Idols

2. Consideration of Behaviors: Second, the Corinthians had problems with considering their behavior. Those with knowledge freely ate whatever they wanted, without restriction. Paul thought they were not being considerate: “Be careful, however, that the exercise of your rights does not become a stumbling block to the weak.” (8:9) Paul thought for those “with weak conscience”: when those lacking knowledge and with weak conscience see what you are eating, they may say Christians also worship idols! See! Isn’t that brother eating food sacrificed to idols? Therefore, when a Christian thinks about whether he can do a certain thing, he should also consider whether this behavior will cause other brothers or sisters to fall. Paul said, “So this weak brother or sister, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. When you sin against them in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ.” (8:11-12)

About Food Once Sacrificed to Idols

3. Choice of Love: Last, Paul encouraged the Corinthians to make the right choices in love: “Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother or sister to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause them to fall.” (8:13) Being able to make choices in love requires further steps of knowledge. The first step of knowledge is to know that idols have no real existence and that sacrificial food can be consumed. The second step of knowledge is to know that love matters more. I will not eat that food if it will cause others to fall. Mature Christians make right choices in love. For the good of brothers and sisters, they would rather give up rights and restrict freedom.

About Food Once Sacrificed to Idols

- **The solution**
- Don't insist on freedom, don't exercise full authority: Paul possessed freedom, yet he did not insist upon his own liberty; Paul held authority, yet he did not exercise the full extent of his power. He said, "Though I am free and belong to no one, I have made myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible." (9:19) And he said, "If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more? But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ." (9:12) For the sake of the Gospel, he willingly chose to limit his own freedom and restrict his own authority.
- Become all things to all people: In order to save as many souls as possible, Paul became like the Jews when among Jews; he became like the Greeks when among Greeks. To the strong, he presented himself as strong; to the weak, he showed consideration for their frailty, limiting his own freedom so that he might win them over. He said, "To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all people so that by all possible means I might save some. I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings." (9:22-23)

About Food Once Sacrificed to Idols

- **The solution**
- **Flee from idols; unite in the Lord:** Eating food sacrificed to idols results from the fact that there are people engaging in idol worship. Corinth was rife with idols, and many believers had previously been idolaters themselves. After believing in Christ, they were required to do two things: first, make a clean and decisive break with idols. Second, be united in Christ; that is, be united with the brothers and sisters with whom they shared the same bread and drank from the same cup.
- Those who believe in Christ must flee from idols and make a clean break. Paul cites the cautionary example of the Israelites: “Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things occurred as examples to keep us from setting our hearts on evil things as they did. Do not be idolaters, as some of them were; as it is written: The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.” (10:5-7) Often, new believers ask me: “Pastor, now that I have believed in Christ, what should I do with the idols I used to worship?” I always exhort them with this counsel: First, worship the one true God, and serve Him alone. Second, remove the idols—do not leave a single one behind. Whether you smash them, burn them, or throw them away, the method does not matter; what matters is that you do it thoroughly and cleanly, leaving not a single one remaining.

Considerations When Taking Actions

- Whatever you do, let everything be done for the glory of God: Paul outlines three negative considerations and one positive consideration regarding our actions.
- **Three negative considerations:**
 1. “I have the right to do anything,” you say—but not everything is beneficial. (6:12, 10:23)
 2. “I have the right to do anything”—but I will not be mastered by anything. (6:12)
 3. “I have the right to do anything”—but not everything is constructive. (10:23)
- **One positive consideration:** So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. (10:31)

Reflection: Was Paul Acting Like a Mighty Apostle?

- Am I not free? Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus our Lord? Are you not the result of my work in the Lord? Even though I may not be an apostle to others, surely I am to you! For you are the seal of my apostleship in the Lord.
- This is my defense to those who sit in judgment on me. Don't we have the right to food and drink? Don't we have the right to take a believing wife along with us, as do the other apostles and the Lord's brothers and Cephas? Or is it only I and Barnabas who lack the right to not work for a living?
- If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you? If others have this right of support from you, shouldn't we have it all the more? But we did not use this right. On the contrary, we put up with anything rather than hinder the gospel of Christ. (9:1-6,11-12)

Reflection: Was Paul Acting Like a Mighty Apostle?

- Paul repeatedly emphasized his apostolic identity to the Corinthians, not to assert his authority or put on airs, but rather to ensure they recognized the true identity of the speaker, thereby enabling them to steer clear of error and return to the right path. Many false teachers had infiltrated the church; lacking the wisdom to discern, the Corinthians listened to one person after another, treating Paul as merely one voice among many. Paul wanted the Corinthians to understand that he was not simply one voice among the crowd, but an apostle distinct from all the others.
- The Corinthians argued: “If you are truly an apostle, why have you not asked us for financial support? Apostles possess the authority to require believers to provide for them; the fact that you have not exercised this authority suggests that you are not an apostle.” Paul responded that he didn’t request support from them, not because of a lack of apostolic authority, but because of their spiritual immaturity. Paul possessed every right to make his living by the Gospel—to reap material sustenance from the Corinthians, and even to take a believing sister as a wife, just as the other apostles did. Yet Paul refrained from doing so, in order to prevent the immature Corinthians find cause for criticism—accusing him of taking advantage of them or coveting their possessions—and thereby hinder the the Gospel of Christ.

How to Interpret 1 Corinthians 10:13?

- No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it. (10:13, NIV)
- This well-known passage of Scripture is frequently cited by Christians to comfort brothers and sisters who are enduring sufferings. The term “temptation” is interpreted here as “trial” or “test.” For instance, imagine a brother who has been laid off, unable to find work after several months, and whose child also became sick; fellow believers might come to comfort him, saying, “Brother, our God is faithful. The trials you are facing are no more than what is common to man; God will surely provide a way out for you, so you must have faith in Him! Come, let us pray together: Faithful Lord, we come before You in petition; we ask that, in accordance with Your precious promises, You open a way of escape for this brother

How to Interpret 1 Corinthians 10:13?

- The context of this passage concerns “idolatry.” Paul addresses the matter of “eating food sacrificed to idols,” while also speaking to the Corinthians who lived in a city filled with idols about the “temptation of idolatry.” Drawing upon the Israelites in the wilderness as a cautionary example, Paul says to the Corinthians:
- Nevertheless, God was not pleased with most of them; their bodies were scattered in the wilderness. Now these things occurred as examples to **keep us from setting our hearts on evil things** as they did. **Do not be idolaters**, as some of them were; as it is written: “The people sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.” **We should not commit sexual immorality**, as some of them did—and in one day twenty-three thousand of them died. **We should not test Christ**, as some of them did—and were killed by snakes. And **do not grumble**, as some of them did—and were killed by the destroying angel. These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the culmination of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall! **No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it.** Therefore, **my dear friends, flee from idolatry.** (10:5-14)

How to Interpret 1 Corinthians 10:13?

- The city of Corinth was filled with idols and was steeped in extreme immorality. Much like the ancient Israelites who worshipped Baal, the religious customs contained elements of sexual immorality that posed a powerful temptation. Addressing this very issue, Paul admonished the Corinthians: “Do not crave evil things; do not be idolaters; do not commit sexual immorality; do not put the Lord to the test; and do not grumble!” These five “do nots” essentially convey a single message: **You must flee from the temptation of idols!**
- The correct explanation of 1 Corinthians 10:13 is not the way out of suffering, but **the certainty of overcoming temptation**: Although the temptation is so great that it seems difficult to overcome, God is faithful and will always open a way out for you when you are tempted, so that you can endure (overcome temptation).
- Here we see the benefits of reading the Bible. When reading the Bible, one must consider the context; since the surrounding text discusses **the temptation of idolatry**, we have not taken the verse out of context, and the meaning that emerges is indeed that of **the temptation of idolatry**. Although interpreting 1 Corinthians 10:13 to mean “God will surely open a way for you amidst your suffering” conveys a fine sentiment, one that offers great comfort and may even, at times, not be entirely incorrect, we must not lose sight of the accurate interpretation. Above all, we must firmly bear this in mind: when reading the Bible, **we must read it within its context!**

Covering the Head during Worship, 11:2-16

- **What went wrong?**
- Some women at gatherings tend to “assert themselves,” refusing to cover their heads when praying or prophesying. A head covering serves as a symbol of “submission to authority.” In that era, the gesture signifying a man’s submission to authority was “not covering his head,” whereas for a woman, it was “covering hers.” Both men and women are required to submit to authority, particularly during gatherings.
- Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head—it is the same as having her head shaved. (11:4-5)

Covering the Head during Worship

- **The cause of the problem**
- **Lack of Reverence for God**: Whether one covers one's head or not, the practice expresses a heart of reverence toward God. Worship is the most sacred of occasions; to adopt a casual attitude in such a holy setting reveals a fundamental lack of reverence for God. This principle remains equally valid in the modern church. Some individuals, while attending services, scroll through their phones, whisper amongst themselves, walk around freely, or arrive late and leave early—all because they lack reverence for God. During the service, they see only the people around them, failing to perceive God. They demonstrate disrespect not only toward God but also toward those who are worshiping. The behavior they display reflects the lowest standard of civic conduct, not even close to elevating to the expected standard of a saint. In secular public places, such as movie theaters or concert halls, audiences typically understand the need to respect others, voluntarily turning off their mobile phones and refraining from walking around. Yet, these individuals swagger through the worship service, acting with total disregard for propriety and doing whatever they please; with neither God nor others in their sight, they exhibit the most abysmal lack of civic virtue.

Covering the Head during Worship

- At times, Christians must make choices regarding what is essential and what is secondary. For instance, many Chinese churches provide lunch services, which require volunteers to serve. These volunteers are deeply loving and work diligently to ensure that their brothers and sisters have a meal after the worship service. However, if lunch preparations conflict with the worship service itself, what should be done? Should the worship service take precedence, or should the lunch service?
- Some individuals remain constantly busy in the kitchen, failing to join the congregation even when the time for worship arrives. They indeed attend church on Sundays, yet they come not to worship, but to cook. Some churches have switched to ordering catered meals, thereby relieving the brothers and sisters of the need to toil in the kitchen. However, a problem remains. Although the catered food is delivered to the church, it still requires serving and portioning out to the congregation. May those serving leave the sanctuary early, before the worship service concludes, to gain a head start on serving food? The answer is “absolutely not”! For the worship of God takes precedence over all other matters. It is far better for everyone to wait and to eat lunch a little later than to allow the worship service to be disrupted.

Covering the Head during Worship

- Disregarding God-ordained authority: Paul states that God is the head of Christ, Christ is the head of every man, and the man is the head of the woman. This constitutes an order of authority, and Christians are called to submit to authority. In the modern 21st-century context of gender equality, how should we interpret the statement “the man is the head of the woman”? In fact, Paul also addresses the equality between men and women. He said: “Nevertheless, in the Lord woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God.” (11:11-12)
- Setting aside the issue of gender equality for the moment, let us focus solely on the matter of submitting to authority. During His time on earth, Christ obeyed the will of His Heavenly Father in all things, remaining obedient even unto death, thereby fulfilling the Father’s will upon the cross. The disciples followed Jesus and submitted to His will; Jesus appointed apostles, and the church submitted to the apostles’ teachings. Furthermore, even with respect to secular governing authorities, the Scriptures instruct us to submit to those who hold power over us. Submission is a voluntary and willing act, never something done under compulsion. It brings forth God’s blessings and protection, and is, indeed, God’s goodwill.

Covering the Head during Worship

- **The solution**
- **Exalt God, not men:** There is only one reason for chaos in worship: God is not seen! As soon as the congregation sees God, a sense of reverence naturally arises. If those holding the worship service focus their attention solely on people, failing to exalt God, or even neglecting to mention Him, God becomes obscured in the service, and the gathering is bound to falter. Conversely, if every person serving in the worship, whether the speaker, the service leader, the worship leader, the ushers, the choir, or anyone else, exalts God, the congregation will inevitably be uplifted, and their hearts will turn toward Him.
- **Submit to “those who submit”:** Submission is bidirectional; if you desire others to submit, you must first submit yourself. The church submits to the apostles only because the apostles submit to Christ. The congregation submits to the pastor only because the pastor submits to the Lord. If a person aspires to lead yet fails to submit themselves, no one will submit to them. Christians submit only to “those who submit,” since Christ is the Head of the Church; others will submit only to the one who submits to Christ.

The Lord's Supper

- **What went wrong?**
- When the Corinthians observed the Lord's Supper, there were divisions among them; their meetings did more harm than good. Some go ahead eating without waiting for others. Even some people get drunk before observing the Lord's supper:
- 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. No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval.
- So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, for when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another gets drunk. (11:18-21)

The Lord's Supper

- **The cause of the problem**
- **Failing to discern the body of the Lord:** The fundamental reason for this issue is that they did not understand the significance of the Lord's Supper, which is why they adopted a flippant attitude. Paul explains the meaning of the Lord's Supper by reiterating to the Corinthians what he himself had received from the Lord. He states that the purpose of the Lord's Supper is to remember Jesus, and its function is to proclaim the Lord's death; therefore, those who partake in the Supper must examine themselves, otherwise they will be guilty of sinning against the body of the Lord and eat and drink judgment on themselves.
- In the modern church, there are some ungodly "believers" who treat the Lord's Supper with a flippant attitude. Some are impatient, feeling that the Lord's Supper merely drags out the duration of the service; others are casual and indifferent, failing to discern the Lord's body, neglecting to examine themselves, and treating the Lord's Supper as a matter of no consequence. Such individuals must be instructed so that they can understand the meaning of the Lord's Supper and observe it with reverence. If their attitude remains unchanged, they cannot remain within the church. If a person claims to be a Christian yet shows no respect for the Lord's Supper and refuses to heed instruction, that individual should not be permitted to remain in the church.

The Lord's Supper

- Despising God's Church: At that time, church gatherings were taking place in the homes of various believers. During these meetings, some individuals would partake in the Lord's Supper while simultaneously eating a full meal. Because the congregation consisted of both the wealthy and the poor, one group would feast on rich foods, toasting and drinking, even getting drunk, while the other went hungry. The church is made up of believers who ought to treat one another with mutual respect. To persist in such behavior, knowing full well that some brothers and sisters are impoverished and can do nothing but look on and swallow their hunger while watching you eat, is as Paul declares to despise the church of God: “So then, when you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat, for when you are eating, some of you go ahead with your own private suppers. As a result, one person remains hungry and another gets drunk. Don't you have homes to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God by humiliating those who have nothing?” (11:20-22)

The Lord's Supper

- **The solution**
- **Eat at home first:** The practical matters must be addressed first. If anyone is hungry, let them eat something at home before coming to the gathering. “**Anyone who is hungry should eat something at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment.**” (11:34) If you are observing the Lord's Supper, observe it properly; do not observe the Lord's Supper while simultaneously eating a meal.
- **Examine yourself and reverently observe the Lord's Supper:** Those who partake in the Lord's Supper must understand its significance and exam himself in heart: Am I able to discern the meaning of the bread and the cup? Do I recognize that, in doing this, I am proclaiming the Lord's death? Am I united in heart and spirit with my brothers and sisters, partaking of the same bread and drinking from the same cup? Are there any divisions within my heart?

The Lord's Supper

- Unite in the Lord: The Lord's Supper is a sacrament of unity, a unity that Christ secured on the cross through the shedding of His own precious blood. The cup we bless is a participation in the blood of Christ; the bread we break is a participation in the body of Christ. **Creating divisions within this sacrament of unity constitutes the gravest blasphemy against Christ.** Those who harbor such an attitude must not partake in the Lord's Supper. They ought to withdraw from this sacred assembly; they will be guilty of sinning against the Lord's body and bringing harm upon the Church.

Devotional Story: A Touching Scene at the Lord's Supper

- “Isn’t that Senator Dionysius? Dionysius is here!”
- Clad in the gold-trimmed white toga of a Roman nobleman, Dionysius walked calmly into the gathering room, nodding and smiling at the assembled crowd. The attendees, flustered and unsure how to react, rose awkwardly to their feet and bowed to him. Most of those gathered were common folk, some were even slaves, and they had never imagined that a nobleman of Dionysius’s stature would ever appear in their midst. The brother presiding over the gathering seemed to know Dionysius; he nodded in acknowledgment and invited him to find a seat.
- “This is the body of the Lord Jesus, given for you” The presiding brother broke off a small piece from the loaf in his hands and passed it to the person beside him. All eyes were fixed on that piece of bread as it was passed down from one person to the next. When it reached Onesimus, who was seated next to Dionysius, he anxiously rubbed his hands vigorously against his clothes several times before breaking off a small piece and reverently passing it to Dionysius. Everyone watched intently, wondering: would such a distinguished man accept a piece of bread that had been touched by so many unclean hands? Yet Dionysius appeared completely composed; he accepted the bread, broke off a small piece, and passed it to the person beside him. The presiding brother announced, “Let us partake of the Lord’s body together!” Dionysius placed the bread into his mouth, consumed it, and then bowed his head in silent prayer, just like everyone else.

Devotional Story: A Touching Scene at the Lord's Supper

- “The Lord Jesus said: This cup is the new covenant established by my blood; whenever you drink it, do so in remembrance of me.” The presiding brother raised the cup of wine to his lips, took a sip, and passed it to the person beside him. It was passed down from one person to the next until it reached Onesimus; suddenly, the atmosphere in the hall grew tense. Onesimus, bewildered, mechanically took a sip; then, suddenly standing up, he spoke in a trembling voice: “Lord Dionysius, I am a slave, and I have already drunk from this cup...” Before he could finish speaking, Dionysius took the cup from his hands, reverently took a sip himself, and passed it on to the person next to him. Witnessing this scene, tears welled up in the eyes of all present.
- After the Lord's Supper, everyone flocked around Deacon Dionysius: “Deacon Dionysius, today we have truly come to realize that you are indeed our brother!” Dionysius was a little surprised; he hurriedly waved his hands and said, “Brothers and sisters, just like you, I am also a disciple of the Lord Jesus. At the Lord's Table, we are all people who receive the grace of Jesus!”
- Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf. (10:16-17)

Spiritual Gifts, Chapter 12

- **What went wrong?**
- The Corinthians divided themselves into factions based on spiritual gifts, giving rise to discord and confusion within the church.
- Now if the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason stop being part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? (12:15-17)
- Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all have gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? (12:29-30)

Gifts	Talents
From God	From God
For God	For Self
Lead people to the Lord	Do not lead people to the Lord
Edify the church	Do not edify the church

Spiritual Gifts	The Fruit of the Spirit
Concerning Ministry	Concerning Life
Outer Performance	Inner reality
Outer gifts supported by inner Life	Inner life manifested through outer gifts
Edify the church	Edify the church

Spiritual Gifts, Chapter 12

- **The cause of the problem**
- 1. **Not Truly Believing in the Lord:** Whenever Paul speaks of spiritual gifts, he begins by emphasizing faith in the Lord. When problems emerge within the church, the primary cause is the presence of false Christians. If an individual has never genuinely believed in the Lord, has not experienced spiritual rebirth, and harbors an inner resistance to obeying the Lord's Word, but continues to exert influence within the church, problems are bound to arise. A true Christian is one who acknowledges Jesus as Lord, not merely as Savior, but specifically as Lord (*kurios*, the one who holds sovereign authority over one's life). It is with such a person that one can meaningfully discuss the truth concerning spiritual gifts.
 - Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit. (12:3)
 - An unbeliever could also say "Jesus is Lord" a hundred times, but that cannot bring about his salvation. "Declaring with your mouth that Jesus is Lord" is a condition for salvation (Romans 10:9), not merely a superficial verbal exercise, but a confession that springs from faith, and is, in fact, the work of the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual Gifts, Chapter 12

- **The cause of the problem**
- 2. **Lack of a holistic perspective:** Whenever Paul addresses the subject of spiritual gifts, he begins by emphasizing “one” and “one body.” Before discussing spiritual gifts, one must first recognize the Triune God, and before focusing on individual believers, one must first recognize the Church as a whole. The Corinthian church faced problems because they saw only people, not God; they saw only individual believers, not the Church in its entirety; and while they acknowledged that many members possessed spiritual gifts, they failed to realize that these gifts were intended for the sake of one body:
 - There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. (12:4-7)
 - Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. (12:12)
 - Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. (12:27)

Spiritual Gifts, Chapter 12

- The cause of the problem
3. **Self-centeredness**: Ultimately, the reason for the problem is quite simple: it is the “self,” selfishness, arrogance, and self-centeredness. Instead of using their gifts to glorify God, build up the church, and serve their brothers and sisters, they boast of their gifts, using them to show off and create divisions.

For the Common Good

- **The purpose of the gift:** Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. (12:7)
- The original Greek word for “common good” is *sum-pherō*, which means “to receive together.” The manifestation of the Holy Spirit in each individual is not for private gain, but for the sake of all. The intention is not merely for the individual recipient to benefit, but for everyone to benefit together. Because the “Chinese Union Version” of the Bible omitted the word “common,” some have mistakenly assumed that spiritual gifts are intended solely for one’s own personal advantage. In contrast, all the major English versions of the Bible successfully convey this sense of “common.”

For the Common Good

- **The solution**

1. **Genuine Faith in the Lord:** One of the fundamental causes of the various problems plaguing the church is the presence of “mixed multitudes,” individuals who do not truly believe in the Lord, masquerading as God’s people and mingling within the congregation. Among these mixed multitudes, some believe in the religion but not in the Lord; they have converted to a religious system known as “Christianity,” yet they have never truly followed Jesus Christ. Others believe in God but not in the Lord; they acknowledge God’s existence and delight in the tangible manifestations of His power, but they have never repented of their sins or believed in Jesus Christ, the one who was crucified for them.
- The situation is as follows: the doors of the church stand open, but its membership is strictly defined. The mission of the church is worldly, reaching out to all the peoples of the earth, yet its essence is holy, set apart exclusively for Jesus Christ. The doors of the church are open to all the people of the world; anyone and everyone is welcome to enter. However, the composition of the church is pure and unmixed; only those who sincerely believe in the Lord, those who have been born again and saved, may become members of the church.
- To resolve the problems in the Corinthians, one must return to the most fundamental level: church members must be genuine believers, without exception.

For the Common Good

- **The solution**

2. **One body:** This is, in fact, the most obvious truth, so obvious that it could not be any more obvious. Paul employs the human body as a metaphor: although the body possesses many parts, it functions in perfect coordination and unity, constituting a cohesive whole that is “many, yet one.” The Church is the Body of Christ; “though it has many members, it is one body.”
- A more mature believer possesses a holistic perspective. He recognizes that he is a member, and while he is indeed vital, much as the eye or the ear is vital, he remains merely a part of the whole. His very existence serves the entire body. The Corinthians stumbled over this most elementary of truths; they went so far as to emphasize their own self-importance, forgetting that they were but a part of the greater whole.
 - To resolve the problems facing the Corinthians, the truth of the “Church” must be emphasized: the Church is the Body of Christ. “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.” (Ephesians 4:4-6)

E Pluribus Unum, Out of Many, One

- On the Great Seal of the United States, as well as on its coins, there is a Latin phrase.
- ***e pluribus unum*, out of many, one**
- If this sentence is reversed, it means
- ***e unum pluribus*, out of one, many**
- Describing the Body of Christ as “out of many, one; out of one, many” is apt and fitting:
- Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. (12:12)

For the Common Good

- The solution

3. **Use Spiritual Gifts:** The Holy Spirit “distributes to each one as He determines,” assigning various gifts, specifically so that we may put them to use to build up the Body of Christ. To possess a gift yet fail to use it is akin to “burying one’s talent in the ground”; it constitutes a dereliction of duty in our role as stewards, for which one will face the Lord’s rebuke. Just as the eyes, ears, mouth, hands, and feet coordinate perfectly to enable the body to function, so too must believers coordinate their gifts with one another to enable the Body of Christ to fulfill its purpose.