

October 8, 2017

The Most Excellent Way

"I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way—in all your speaking and in all your knowledge—because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed." I Corinthians 1:4-9

Understanding the Apostle Paul's comments about the body of believers to Corinthians within the context of our modern view of church is difficult at best. Since the first believers started building church buildings we have become more and more wedded to the idea that church is a function of its building. We have developed an entire vocabulary to support this idea. We talk about "going to church" and holding "services at church". We often call our auditoriums or meeting rooms the "sanctuary" and many of us believe that a church building is by its very existence a holy place where we come to meet God.

At the beginning of this thing called church in the first century there were no buildings and the concept of church was very different than it is now. It is within this initial context that the Apostle writes to the believers in Corinth about their function as a body of Christ; a church.

When these believers gathered together to celebrate the "***Lord's Supper***" some were selfishly eating and drinking before all of the believers had gathered together. The Apostle reminds them of the meaning of this meal referring to Jesus' instructions on the night of his betrayal. Our Savior focused this "***Supper***" on our act of remembering him. ***"...do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me"*** he commands. Paul adds to this direction, ***"Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and the blood of the Lord. A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread or drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself."***

For years I thought this meant that somehow I had to "see" the body of Jesus on the cross with the blood flowing from his side whenever I took of this "***Supper***". But, when we keep to Paul's context in this chapter and the next I have come to believe that the body he refers to is the church. When I selfishly gratify my desires, I fail to understand that as believer I am a part of a body of believers to whom I literally belong.

To selfishly consume our dinner before all of the others arrive is to hurt the body of which I am only a part. The Apostle carries this same thought forward into the next chapter when he talks about our Spirit-given gifts. He writes, ***"There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service by the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works them in all men." Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good."***

As members of this body of believers called the church all of us are given gifts and abilities by the Spirit that dwells within us. No matter what those gifts are they have not been given for our good alone, but for the good of the whole body of believers.

The Apostle defines this body for us. He writes, ***"The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ...Now you are the body of Christ, and each of you is a part of it."*** As believers each and every one of us has been added to the body of Christ; the church, in order to carry out God's

design for the church. All of us are a part of this body and all of us are gifted, talented, able, and trained to benefit this body so that it can do whatever God has decided we, as a body, need to be doing. All of us are a part of this body, but all of us do not have the same function within this body.

And finally, this body to which we have all been added, does not exist only in a building. It always exists. I am not part of the body of Christ on Sunday mornings and not a part of that same body all of the rest of the time. I am the body of Jesus all of the time, in every place, no matter where that might be. You and I are always a part of the body of Christ and because of that you and I always belong not only to Jesus, but to one another as well.

