

“When Ye Come Together”

1 Corinthians 11:17-22

Although we will look at these verses separately, they are part of a greater context that extends to the end of the chapter – a discourse on the Lord’s Supper.

In these verses we find the words “come together” used three times (they are found two more times at the end of the chapter in verses 33 and 34). The words are used in a negative sense – the church was coming together both with the wrong attitude and for the wrong reason – but the principle of “coming together” for corporate worship is still the underlying thought.

This principle is especially relative in modern times (even prior to the pandemic issues) when there is a growing belief and teaching among those that claim to be Christians that gathering together “in one place” is no longer important, and that you can still be part of “the church” without actually going to a place where other believers are gathered together for the purpose of edifying the body of Christ. This passage would clearly teach otherwise.

The church in Corinth, as we saw at the beginning of the letter, had divisions throughout, and those divisions come back to the forefront of the Apostle’s mind in relation to the Lord’s Supper. Although this was the occasion for this portion of the letter, these verses teach a much broader principle – when we come together as an assembly of believers there should never be anything that distracts us from the purpose of edification. We will see here that it does happen, and when it does happen the Lord uses that to clearly distinguish between the true, godly

believer and those that are just “playing church,” or who have a less than admirable agenda in mind.

Some points need to be dealt with concerning the terms “come together,” “in the church,” “the church of God,” and “into one place” before we actually look at the context itself. These terms are important in any overall understanding of the New Testament, especially those portions that deal with what happens in an actual church service. These terms make a direct connection to the previous portion of this letter that dealt with the right order, the right decorum, the right view, and the right attitude when it comes to worship in the assembly of believers.

1. The words “come together” mean what they appear to mean – a group of people gathered together in one place. There is an assumption made in the words “that ye” and “when ye” that believers will be gathered together for the purpose of “church” in every place that an assembly is called for that purpose.
 - a. The word used for this term – συνέρχομαι – is a compound Greek word: σύν, “a primary preposition denoting union” (Strong); and, έρχομαι, “to come, of persons, to come from one place to another, and used both of persons arriving; to appear, make one’s appearance, come before the public” (Thayer).
 - b. Put together, in a literal sense, it is the union of people coming together from one place to another place. This is precisely what church is – today as was then.
2. The words “in the church” - εν τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ are also used to describe church. There is a worthy note to be made here when it comes to the Greek manuscripts used for the English versions of the

Bible. The Textus Receptus, from which the KJV is translated, has the definite article before the word for "church" – the manuscripts from which almost all other English translations are derived does not. That may not sound very significant but with the definite article "the" it makes a clear distinction that when a group of believers are gathered together in one place they are "the church," not just an assembly of people.

- a. We studied this particular term (and that of the next point) more than two years ago when we first started this study of First Corinthians. By way of review, here are a few remarks on the term itself:
- b. The word for "church" here (and in more than 100 other places in the New Testament) is the Greek word "ecclesia."
 - i. The word "ecclesia" means called out assembly – it comes from two Greek words:
 - 1) The first one means "out of" ("ek");
 - 2) The other is a verb that means "to call."
 - 3) So, literally, "the called out" – as already stated, the church is not a noun but a verb, and the very definition of the word translated "church" in many English versions of the Bible bears that out.
 - 4) Of note, here, is the definition of the word "church" in our English Bibles – it is a word that is most commonly referred to as "the house of the Lord" (tracing back to the Greek word "kuriakon" – the word for building, and the word "kurios" for Lord). The original

Greek word for "church" had nothing to do with a building – it referred to the believers themselves.

- ii. The usage of the word in Bible times was not initially a spiritual one – it was used for "an assembly of the people convened at the public place of council for the purpose of deliberating" (Thayer)
 - 1) "It originally meant an assembly called out by the magistrate, or by legitimate authority" (Smith and Hackett).
 - 2) "Every citizen of Corinth knew about the ecclesia of Corinth. In every Greek city the ecclesia was – to use modern term which will help us – the town council. It was the governing body in the affairs of every Greek city, consisting of a company of men called out to take oversight of the city." (G. Campbell Morgan).
- iii. Considering the brief etymology of the word, it can be seen that "church" in the New Testament was an assembly (a congregation) of those that had been "called out" of the world unto the Lord (where the word "church" comes in) for a purpose
 - 1) In its broadest sense, it is all those that are believers in Christ, the family of God, the church of God (universal).
 - 2) In its practical application, it is a group of believers assembled together in a local place for the purpose of worship and service to the Lord – such as we find in this verse – "Which is at

Corinth.”

3. That distinction is made again in verse 22 in the phrase, “the church of God” – both sets of Greek manuscripts have it this way. This, again, points to the congregation of believers assembled together in one place, in the name of God, for the purpose of edification.
4. The phrase “into one place” makes the point of assembly clear. Although there wouldn’t have been a single church house where people gathered in a city the size of Corinth, wherever they did meet, in however many places, each of those assemblies was considered not just PART of the church of God, but were called “THE church of God” because it represented, in a local area, what God intends a church to be, and what the Son of God came to earth to ransom to Himself. This is the reason this text, as well as all those that deal with difficulties in a church are so important – we, as a body of believers, represent the whole of the body of Christ to the little part of the world in which we live.

I. WRONG REASON – VS. 17

A. Speaks to the primary purpose of “coming together” for “church” as seen in the New Testament – edification and ministry.

B. The purpose of “coming together” for “church” is still one that is either misunderstood or blatantly misused. The greater context of these verses is primarily dealing with the Lord’s Supper and its importance, and the principles for which it is to be observed, and the

consequences if abused; but there are at least two other secondary implications given in this text that we need to be careful we don't miss. This is one of those "missing the forest for the trees" principles.

C. I've mentioned often what the primary purpose of assembling together in a church service is – to become equipped to do the work of the ministry outside the walls of the church. This points to that, only in a negative way.

D. To that point of primary purpose, we will look at Ephesians 4:11-16 and see what that text says as to why we "come together" for "church."

[Ephesians 4:11-16](#)

11 And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

12 For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

13 Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:

14 That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

15 But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ:

¹⁶ From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

(From notes I gave on Ephesians 4:12)

Gifted people are given to the church, and in the church, for the Lord.

There is a purpose that God needs people given **to** Him, so they can in turn be given **by** Him to the church. That specific purpose is listed here for us in clear description.

1. "For the perfecting of the saints"

- a) The word "for" (πρός) here is one that means "with a view to" – the ultimate aim of the purpose of a church is this.
- b) The word "perfecting" (καταρτισμός – only time this Greek word is used in the Bible) means "the act of making fully ready, the act of perfectly equipping and fully preparing" (Bullinger). The word in its classical usage referred to "the refitting of a ship, or setting a bone" (Vincent).

The root of this word (καταρτιζω) is used in Matt. 4:21, translated as "mending," which gives a good definition of the use in Ephesians 4. "It properly refers to 'the restoring of anything to its place;' then putting in order, making complete, etc. Here it means that these various officers were appointed in order that everything in the church might be well arranged, or put into its proper place; or that the church might be 'complete.' It is that Christians

may have every possible advantage for becoming complete in love, and knowledge, and order" (Barnes).

Matthew 4:21

²¹ And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them.

Mark Twain said once that the church is a place where a nice respectable person stands in front of other nice, respectable people and urges them to be nicer and more respectable. If that is all the church does, it is leading people down the wrong path.

2. "For the work of the ministry"

- a) The word "for" (εἰς) here is a different Greek word which means "the immediate purpose of the gift" (Vincent).
- b) The ultimate purpose was "the perfecting of the saints." The immediate purpose is "the work of the ministry."
- c) The word "ministry" (διακονία) is the spiritual service of an official character. What is in view is the purpose a church has the men mentioned in verse 11 was for the purpose of "perfecting" the saints.

Acts 6:4

⁴ But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.

Acts 20:24

²⁴ But none of these things move me,

neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

1 Timothy 1:12

¹² And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry;

3. "For the edifying of the body of Christ"

- a) "For" here is the same Greek word as that used in the previous phrase – "for the work of the ministry."
- b) The word "edifying" (οἰκοδομή) means the building up of something. Here it is the body of Christ, or the church.
- c) This defines the nature of the work of ministry.
- d) This is how we do the work of the ministry, for the ultimate purpose of the perfecting of the saints.

E. "Now in this that I declare unto you" – the word "this," based upon its use and place in the verse, is referencing what he is about to say. The word "declare" (παρᾶγγέλλω) is one that is most often translated "command" or "charge" (in their various forms). Of the thirty times it is used in the New Testament, all but this use it is translated by those two words. It is a strong word that is meant to draw someone near (παρά) by telling or declaring (ἀναγγέλλω); hence, in its use here means "to give the word to

someone nearby, to advance an order, charge or command" (Zodhiates).

F. "I praise you not" – in verse two of this chapter the Apostle is praising them that they had followed him in those things he taught and although they may have needed more instruction on the order and decorum in worship, he now comes to a matter (still related to the greater context, in which the issue of order and decorum rest, as well – "fellowship at the Lord's Table," as Scofield terms it) that he could not praise them for, but instead he has to condemn them, and rebuke them for their gross error and abuse of the Lord's Supper.

G. "That ye come together not for the better" – not for the good, not for your benefit, not for your edification (its meaning in this context).

H. "But for the worse" – the word for "worse" (ἥττον) is only used one other time in the New Testament in 2 Cor. 12:15, where it is translated "less."

[2 Corinthians 12:15](#)

¹⁵ And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved.

"[B]ecause you come together not for the better (so that edification results) but for the worse (so that propriety is violated, and the result is to the hindering of the faith). (Alford)

II. WRONG RELATIONSHIPS – VS. 18-19

A. *Speaks to the issue of fellowship as part of the reason we “come together” for “church.”*

B. *Because the church came together for the wrong reason, their relationships among the assembly was not what it should have been. If they would have come together with the primary purpose of edification, then the unity of the believers would have been maintained. Since they came together with a different purpose in mind, they ended up with divisions (something that was addressed early in this letter to the Corinthian believers – 1:10).*

C. *The following are some things I wrote in relation to 1 John 1:3-10 and the issue of “fellowship.”*

1 John 1:3-10

³ That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

⁴ And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.

⁵ This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

⁶ If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:

⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from

all sin.

⁸ If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

⁹ If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

¹⁰ If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

The English word "fellowship" is used 17 times in the Bible – two times in the Old Testament and 15 times in the New. There are two separate Hebrew words used for "fellowship" in the Old Testament (each used and two different Greek words in the New. The first time the word appears in the Bible is in the book of Leviticus (6:2) and is a word that is referring to having been given something to be kept in security as a pledge and isn't really referring to what we commonly use the word for today. The other word in the OT that is translated "fellowship" (חֶבֶר) is found in Psalm 94:20 ("Shall the throne of iniquity have fellowship with thee"), and it is used in the way we would today, coming from a word that means simply to join oneself to something. Oddly enough, it is used in a negative way to show just what 1 John 1:6 shows – that God will have no fellowship with darkness, with iniquity, with sin. The analogy is if we are going to fellowship with Him, we must be pure.

Although the word "fellowship" (English) only appears 15 times in the New Testament, the Greek word (κοινωνία) that is translated "fellowship" is used 20 times and is also translated "communion," "communicate,"

“communication,” “contribution,” and “distribution”. It would do us well to understand this word as it is very important to us as believers, as is found in the book of 1 John (where the word is used 4 times in chapter one alone).

The word translated “fellowship” means to share in, participation with, and sharer of common interests. One author said this: “A relation between individuals which involves a common interest and a mutual, active participation in that interest and in each other.” (Robertson)

Those 20 times this word is used can be broken down into just three simple categories:

1. Fellowship with God
2. Fellowship with other believers
 - a) Simply for their companionship – we need to come to the realization that God intends for us to have companionship of other believers, and to not have that is a dangerous way to live – vs. 3, 7.

[Acts 2:42](#)

⁴² And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

All three of the areas dealt with in the text in First Corinthians is dealt with in this verse, describing the very earliest of churches: “the apostles’ doctrine” – speaks of edification, the primary purpose of church; “fellowship” – as seen, another purpose of church; and, “in breaking of

bread” – the Lord’s Supper. There is one more in that verse that’s not dealt with in the text in First Corinthians directly – “and in prayers.”

- b) Participate with them in taking the Gospel to the world.

Galatians 2:9

⁹ And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.

- c) To be there to help when others need it – The Greek word “koinonia” is used more times for this point than for any other, indicating that true fellowship is simply caring about what happens to other believers.

Romans 15:26

²⁶ For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain **contribution** for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem.

2 Corinthians 8:4

⁴ Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the **fellowship** of the ministering to the saints.

2 Corinthians 9:13

¹³ Whiles by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal **distribution** unto them, and unto all men;

Philippians 1:5

⁵ For your **fellowship** in the gospel from the first day until now;

Philemon 6

⁶ That the **communication** of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.

Hebrews 13:16

¹⁶ But to do good and to **communicate** forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

When a friend of mine couldn't sell his home after a move, he decided to rent it out. Twice in three years, tenants broke the lease and skipped town after trashing the place, leaving my friend with thousands of dollars in repairs.

He tried to sell the house again, and it sat on the market for months while he made mortgage payments he couldn't afford. His credit cards maxed out, foreclosure became a possibility, and his stress was sky-high.

When he told friends at church about his problem, they responded in a big way. Within 48 hours:

- His couples' Bible study gave him and his wife a check that more than covered their next mortgage payment, giving them more time to sell the house.

- His Sunday school teacher--a realtor and financial adviser--prayed with him and his wife, encouraging them and offering wise counsel.

- A church elder--an attorney my friend could never afford--spent 90 minutes on the phone with him, giving solid advice.

My friend was striking out, and the church stepped up to the plate. But it never could have happened if he hadn't put his pride aside and made his needs known.

(Mark Moring, editor of Men of Integrity)

3. Having no fellowship with unbelievers

D. The Apostle begins verse 18 with what appears to be a first in a series of at least two, but there's no indication of what the second error was he was attempting to correct in this portion (down through the end of the chapter). It is likely that the "second" that answers to the "first" is found in 1 Cor. 12:1, where the subject of the abuse of spiritual gifts is considered. (Alford, Meyer, and Macknight hold this view – as found in Dr. Alford's comments on this verse.)

E. "I hear there be divisions among you" – as pointed out already, this issue was addressed in 1:10. The divisions in the church caused an abundance of problems, as they always do.

1. "I hear" – it is a very poor testimony if a

church is known for its divisions, for its problems, and it would seem that's what the church at Corinth had developed.

2. "Divisions" – σχίσμα – transliterated by the English word "schism."
 - a) "Schism" is defined as "a split or division between strongly opposed sections or parties, caused by differences in opinion or belief."
 - b) "The word properly means a rent, such as is made in cloth Matt. 9:16; Mark 2:21, and then a division, a split, a faction among people; John 7:43; John 9:10; John 10:19. It does not mean here that they had proceeded so far as to form separate churches, but that there was discord and division in the church itself..." (Barnes)

Matthew 9:16

¹⁶ No man putteth a piece of new cloth unto an old garment, for that which is put in to fill it up taketh from the garment, and the **rent** is made worse.

F. "And I partly believe it" – we might say, "And I'm not surprised." The Apostle may have not gotten all the information he would have needed to know the extent of the divisions, but the fact that it was reported didn't surprise him.

G.

III. WRONG RESULT – VS. 20-22

A. Speaks to the primary purpose of this text – coming together to partake of the

Lord's Supper.

B. Once their reaction to truth was compromised, the result was anything but proper and biblical. They ended up abusing the principles of the Lord's Supper and suffered because of it.

C.