DISCERNING THE LORD'S BODY

(I Corinthians 11:27 – 34)

The Corinthian church of Christ had many serious problems within her. None were any less serious than the manner in which the Lord’s Supper was observed. From what Paul writes in this chapter it would appear that it would have been better had this sacred supper been “skipped” than to have been observed in the way that it was. Paul said that they came “together not for the better but for the worse.” (verse 17) One reason for Paul’s chastisement was because of the division that was apparent within the congregation. (verse 18) Division within the body of Christ is never acceptable but surely there could not be a worse place for division to be apparent than at the Divine Table of our Lord. A second reason for Paul’s chastisement was the practice of some of the Corinthians eating their “own supper ahead of others” where “one is hungry and another is drunk.” (verse 21) The “supper” of verse 21 is not the Lord’s Supper but the common food or the common meal that they ate at their love feast, the agape feast. That the Corinthians were “sloppy” with their “agape” is more than a cute cliché; it was a sickening, unspiritual, ungodly reality. Those who “had,” had no compulsion to share with those who “had not.” There was no sense of unity, no sense of camaraderie, no demonstration of love one for another in this congregation. The Corinthians were making an absolute sham of a spiritual supper that was spread before them at the expense of the life of the one who they said was their Lord. It is difficult to imagine anyone claiming to be a follower of Christ conducting him or herself in a more ungodly manner than these people did. Paul concluded his judgment of their making a mockery of the sacred Table saying “I do not praise you.” (verse 22)

All of this has been said in order to understand the meaning of Paul’s statement in verse 29 that one who “eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s body.” The “Lord’s body” is not in reference to the actual, physical body of Christ though it is obvious by their behavior that they were giving little if any thought to that. But the “Lord’s body” as Paul uses it here is the Lord’s “spiritual” body, His church. One who “eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord’s church.” The lack of unity which manifested itself by the Corinthians’ failure to share with the “have not’s” in the agape feast reflected their woeful failure to appreciate the nature of the spiritual body in which they gathered themselves. The attitude or spirit of self-centeredness or the separateness from the other members of the church is never appropriate and certainly not at the table that was instituted for the corporate church. If there is a place for the church to be in an attitude of “oneness” it is at the Lord’s Table.
As we gather today around this table, it is true that we are to examine ourselves individually. But that examination ought to include the questions: “Have we considered the needs of the individuals who make up this local body of Christ? Is there one who needs to be encouraged? Is there one who needs material help? Is there one who is suffering? Is there one who is missing from the table?” Of all places, the church should be the place where brethren rejoice with brethren, and brethren weep with brethren. Each of us came here individually but we are a family – a family of God. In families that truly care for one another nobody is a nobody because God has made us all a somebody.