*Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have walked in my integrity, and I have trusted in the Lord without wavering. Prove me, O Lord, and try me; test my heart and mind. For Your steadfast love is before my eyes, and I walk in faithfulness to You. I do not sit with the worthless, nor do I consort with hypocrites; I hate the company of evildoers and will not sit with the wicked. I wash my hands in innocence and go around Your altar, O Lord, singing aloud a song of thanksgiving and telling all Your wondrous deeds. O Lord, I love the house in which You dwell and the place where Your glory abides. Do not sweep me away with sinners nor my life with the bloodthirsty, those in whose hands are evil devices and whose right hands are full of bribes. But as for me, I walk in my integrity; redeem me and be gracious to me. My foot stands on level ground; in the great congregation I will bless the Lord.* Psalm 26

*Now in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, to begin with, when you come together as a Church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. Indeed, there have to be factions among you, for only so will it become clear who among you are genuine. When you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord’s supper. For when the time comes to eat, each of you proceeds to eat your own supper, and one goes hungry, and another becomes drunk. What! Do you not have households to eat and drink in? Or do you show contempt for the Church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I commend you? In this matter I do not commend you! For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when He was betrayed took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said: “This is my body offered for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way He took the cup after supper, saying: “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes. Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be answerable for the body and blood of the Lord. Examine yourselves, and only then eat of the bread and drink of the cup.* 1 Corinthians 11:17-28

*One spring day, three-year-old Douglas helped his grandfather fertilize the lawn.*

*When the job was finished, Grandpa handed his grandson two quarters.*

*“Well, Douglas,” Grandpa said, looking at the lawn, “what do you think?”*

*Looking at the money in his hand, Douglas confidently replied: “I think it needs to be done again, Grandpa*.”

The New Covenant

1. Long before any of the Gospels were written, Apostle Paul’s letter to the Corinthians circulated in the Church of the first century, allowing people to better understand the teachings of Jesus. Today, in some Christian circles, the notion of Paul’s letters carrying much less value than Jesus’ words, is often introduced, to especially justify and validate of what is commonly known and referred to as the *“social justice”* issues. In those circles it became natural to accept the notion of Jesus’ words carrying much more weight than Paul’s, because Paul spoke about the daily applications of Christ’s teachings while the Evangelists did not include these in recording Jesus’ ministry. Consequently, Paul’s views, according to those *“modern ideologists,”* should be ignored. For me this type of logic is not only totally wrong and false, but it utterly undermines the importance of the New Testament and even of the entire Bible. After all, the Scriptures were written over the centuries by many different people, always with a specific audience in mind and for the specific situations. Applying the logic of these *“modern”* so-called *“scholars,”* one might conclude that since the Bible is a *“man made product,”* therefore it does not really carry the authority of God as His Word. Such a notion circulates among many of the *“progressive theologians,”* in some Christian circles today. As I see it, and the history teaches, because of the words of the Apostle Paul, the Church of the first century, although growing with a limited written account of Jesus’ teaching, grew in much greater, more expansive, and definitely more inclusive fashion than most of the *“progressive”* churches of our times.

2. The affirmation of the Lord’s Supper is the integral part of Church’s practice and a clear explanation of what the *“communion*” is and why it is important, lies in the heart of the Apostle Paul’s comments. Verse 17 is especially significant, because Paul indicates there that sharing at the *“Lord’s Table”* in the Church Corinth, was not in accordance with Jesus’ reasons for establishing the *“communion table.”* Paul seems to say: *“I cannot accept your views and your ways, because you have departed from the teachings of Jesus, yet I do not want to condemn you but instead I want to tell you what the communion really is all about.”* We need to realize that Paul addresses his letter to the Church in Corinth, the Church very much like many churches of our times. There were rich and the poor members in this Church, and there were also different factions there, as these occur naturally in any if not in every communal body. In any group of people there are the differences of opinions. As you know, my background is Baptist, and back in my native Poland we would often say that where there are three Baptists, there are four opinions. The Church in Corinth was a young Church, they did not have the Scriptures like we do to be able to discern and to know what and how they are to live their lives and with what sort of conduct. It was very important to Paul not to try to persuade the people there to abandon of who they are, since they all came from different backgrounds, with some not even knowing the Jewish, spiritual tradition. Paul’s idea was to share with them a need to practice, in everything, the true love, love which stressed most of all the equality of all of them. Paul did not want to change the existing social statuses, because he understood that these statuses will always exist, but he expresses the importance of the equality as it was taught by Jesus, regardless of anybody’s social status.

3. The Early Church would at first perceive the communion as a sort of a *“potluck”* meal, but as Paul says, the disparities among the church members based on their social statuses, led to the situations where some would share in the meal, and some would not. On top of this, the excesses in eating and drinking were another problem Paul saw and pointed out to. He viewed them as not only lacking of the understanding of what Christian love is all about, but even of understanding of what is the Lord’s Supper. He understood they were really lacking of that knowledge and needed to be taught. Paul understood the *“Lord’s Supper”* not to be a common meal as they might have perceived it and certainly needed to know that Jesus did not established the *“communion”* for that purpose. The *“communion meal”* was not to be served only to the chosen few, mainly the rich, but to everyone. In his explanation Paul recalls the very words of Jesus, the ones He shared on that fateful Thursday night in the *“Upper Room”* in Jerusalem while sharing the *“Passover”* meal with His disciples. Paul was very clear that what he says is not his own idea, but is directed by Jesus Himself, and he shares Jesus’ concept of the *“communion.”* So, he writes: *“For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you.”* We also must realize and understand even today that what Paul wrote was inspired by the Holy Spirit. The people needed to know that, so Paul is teaching them this in his letter.

4. The Lord’s Supper is not a celebration invented by the Church, by Paul or by any other person nor a particular tradition. This is the celebration originated by Jesus Christ Himself. Following my message today, I will invite you, all of you, to share in our *“communion table,”* just as Jesus invited His disciples to do so, for this is not our but *“Jesus’ Table.”*  It is also important to know that as I said in the opening words of my sermon, the letter to the Church in Corinth was written long before any of the Gospels were, and it is as far as we know, the oldest written reference to the *“communion.”* Paul therefore needed to explain to the people of what the sharing of the *“body and blood”* of Jesus was all about. Even today, having the Scriptures, we have different views of what the *“communion”* is, and today many churches use even different names for this celebration: the *“Eucharist,”* the *“Communion,”* the *“Lord’s Supper,”* the *“Sharing of the Table,”* the *“Braking Bread,”* to name just a few. According to the historical sources, in the early days of Christianity, there was a lot of confusion among the general population as to what these *“Christians really believe and do,”* and very often, because of the words: *“take and eat, this is my body and my blood”* were only heard, not witnessed, Christians were accused of *“cannibalism.”* The invention of *“gossip,”* which is so widely used today, especially by the journalists and the politicians is not necessarily the invention of our times, our culture, or our society. Gossip always proves that the lack of knowledge, or the limited knowledge was and still is very dangerous.

5. Today, Christian Churches technically recognize three distinctive traditions of the *“communion”* represented by most of the denominations and traditions. The Roman Catholics and the Lutherans in their respective traditions recognize the literal presence of Christ’s body and blood in the communion host. For the Roman Catholics this presence occurs through the process called *“transubstantiation”* and the *“eucharistic prayer,”* while for the Lutherans this occurs through what is called the *“sacramental union.”* We must remember that Luther never really left the Roman Catholic Church, he wanted to *“reform it,”* and his theology was very much the same as the Roman Catholic Church. The differences and separation eventually occurred in the subsequent years following his death.

The churches following the Calvinists tradition, such as Presbyterians, Reformed, some Baptists and some Non-Denominational churches, also accept the presence of Christ in the host, but this is not a physical presence. In Calvin’s theology Christ presence occurs in the spiritual form, and in this the Calvinists substantially differ in their traditions from that of the Lutherans and the Roman Catholics.

For the Evangelical, many Non-Denominational, majority of Baptists, Pentecostals, and Free Churches, the tradition generally accept the presence of Jesus Christ in the host, but this is neither a physical nor a spiritual presence, it is mainly a symbolic presence, therefore their communion in most cases follows the so called *“open communion”* where everyone may participate. What all these traditions have in common is the understanding that salvation has been offered not only to a chosen few, but to all the people, and by taking part in sharing of the *“bread and wine,”* they accept the sacrifice of Jesus for their own sake.

6. Paul’s view of the communion also indicates the importance of being able to recognize that the covenant between Christ and His people is sealed by Jesus’ death *(there is no forgiveness of sin without blood being shed)*. Through repentance and the acceptance of His sacrifice, salvation was given to us through God’s grace. Paul also reminded the Corinthians, and through them also us, that the Lord’s Supper is not a one-time event that occurred in the past *“once and for all,”* but it is to be proclaimed constantly until Jesus will come again. It is in a sense also a confirmation of another important message given to the Church by Jesus, the one we often refer to as the *“Great Commission,”* in which we are to share the message of the Gospel and salvation to all the people. Only through the acceptance of Jesus’ sacrifice people might be saved, and *“communion”* is celebrated as the act of remembrance. In the end Paul also warns that *“communion”* must not be understood and shared as a casual observance, but it must involve repentance, self-examination, and the necessity of being at peace with God and with one another. This is not just another, casual meal, this is much more, this is the personal engagement in the full communion, union, with Jesus Christ.

7. Someone commented that even the sinners though must not to be afraid to partake in the *“Lord’s Table,”* if they confess their sins to Jesus Christ. His *“Table”* is not given to the perfect people only, to the selected few, for if it was, nobody would truly be able to partake in it. It is offered to all those who are willing to share at it with Jesus Christ. I read about a pastor who saw someone being afraid to receive communion because of that someone’s sinfulness, and this pastor said: *“Take it, it is for sinners, so it is for you.”* This indeed is not our table because it belongs to the Lord and He invites us all to participate in it with Him. Who are we indeed to decide who may or may not take part in that celebration? So, just like Paul writes: *“examine yourselves, and come to the Lord Table.”* In doing so, we remember His body being broken for us and His blood shed for us, in the “New Covenant” of His.