

The Celebration of the Lord's Supper, Part 2

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 11:23–34

Code: 1847

INTRODUCTION

John 6:51-54 is an important passage that can help us better understand the Lord's Supper. It focuses on Christ presenting Himself to the Jewish people as the Bread of Life. In verse 51 He says, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven; if any man eat of this bread, he shall live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. " That means that God the Son entered our world by taking on human form, He offers eternal life to those who receive Him in faith (symbolized by eating). Although He used physical terminology, He was conveying a spiritual message: to take Him to satisfy one's soul as a man eats bread to satisfy his stomach. Jesus' statement confused some of those who heard Him: "The Jews, therefore, [argued] among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. He who eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him" (vv. 52- 56). These Jews were interpreting Jesus's metaphor in a literal, physical sense, but the Lord was speaking in a figurative way. He was saying they would need to acknowledge that He was God in human flesh and appropriate His sacrificial death on their behalf.

Unless you can accept the incarnation and the substitutionary blood- atoning death of Christ on your behalf, you will never have eternal life. When you were saved you did just that. And when you share in the bread and cup of Communion, you symbolize that spiritual appropriation. Communion is a restatement of our salvation, and should also be a rededication of our faith. So it's vital that we share in it.

ReviewThe early church made it a regular practice to share in the Lord's Supper as a memorial to the One who lived and died for them, as a time of communion with Him, as a proclamation of the meaning of the Lord's death, and as a sign of their anticipation of His return. The sacred and comprehensive nature of Communion behooves us to treat it with the dignity it deserves. That is precisely what the Corinthians did not do. They had turned the Lord's Supper into a mockery.

I. THE PERVERSION OF THE LORD'S SUPPER (vv. 17-22)

LESSON

II. THE PURPOSE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER (vv. 23-26)

These verses are a beautiful presentation of the meaning of the Lord's Supper. They resemble a diamond dropped in the middle of a muddy road because the situation in Corinth was so vile. Having preceded the passage with a rebuke of the church's failures and following it with a warning of chastisement, Paul drops this beautiful explanation in the midst of an irreverent and selfish background.

A. The Remembrance Requested (vv. 23-25)

1. The source of the Supper (v. 23a)

"I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you"

What Paul had to say to the Corinthians Christians was not his own opinion. It wasn't some tradition

that had been handed down from person to person; it was revelation he had directly received from the Lord. In fact, most conservative Bible scholars agree that 1 Corinthians was probably written before any of the four gospels, which would make this passage this first divine revelation regarding the Lord's Supper.

2. The setting of the Supper (v. 23b)

"The Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed"

a) The timing(1) The night of betrayalPaul said that to set the historical context. He could have said, "on the eve of the Passover" or "on Thursday night before the crucifixion. " But in mentioning the betrayal of Jesus, he sets the establishment of this beautiful ceremony against the background of something as ugly as the betrayal of Christ to heighten the contrast. In a similar way John 13, which records one of the most beautiful passages of love in the Bible, is interwoven with Satan entering Judas, who then went out and betrayed Jesus. And at the cross God the Son was surrounded by mockery and rejection while dying for the sins of the world. Such dark backgrounds make what Christ did all the more beautiful. (2) The night of PassoverThe night Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper was not an ordinary night. It had special significance since it was also the Passover. Once a year the Jewish people celebrate Passover, which commemorates God's deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt. The Lord's Supper is the New Testament parallel to the Passover feast because it too celebrates God's delivering power, though in a greater way--we remember God taking us out of bondage to sin into the kingdom of His dear Son (Col. 1:13). This Passover was also significant because Jesus was crucified the next day while Passover was still being observed. As the Lamb of God, He was the ultimate Passover sacrifice (John 1:29; 1 Cor. 5:7). b) The traditionThe Passover meal was structured around sharing four cups of wine at different intervals during the meal. (1) The first cupThe Passover began when the host pronounced a blessing over the first cup, which was filled with red wine, symbolic of the blood of the lamb at the passover in Egypt. That was followed by bitter herbs, which symbolized the bitterness of their bondage, and an explanation of the meaning of the Passover. The participants then sang Psalms 113 and 114 from a grouping of psalms called the Hallel (Heb. , "praise"). (2) The second cupAfter the second cup, the host would break the unleavened bread, dip it into bitter herbs and a fruit sauce called charoseth, and share it with the participants in the meal. The unleavened bread symbolized the haste with which Israel was delivered out of Egypt. Then roasted lamb was brought out. (3) The third cupWhen the Passover meal was done, the host prayed and then took the third cup. Then the participants sang the rest of the Hallel (Pss. 115-118). It was the third cup following the meal that Jesus blessed and transformed into the Lord's Supper. Rather than remembering the physical deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, the participants in Communion were to remember Christ's death and the deliverance it provided. (4) The fourth cupAt the close of the meal, the participants enjoyed the fourth and final cup, which celebrated the coming kingdom. Mark 14:26 records the tradition of singing a closing hymn: "When [Jesus and the disciples] had sung an hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. "The Body and Blood of ChristJesus' identification of the wine and bread as His blood and body has been interpreted by the Roman Catholic church to be literal references to His physical blood and body. But that shows a misunderstanding of the meaning of the Greek verb estin ("to be"). The verb is frequently used to mean "represents. " When Jesus said, "This is my body . . . this cup is the new testament in my blood" (1 Cor. 11:24-25), He was saying that the bread and wine of that Passover meal represented His body and blood. The wine was not literally His blood; His blood was still in His veins when He said that. And the bread was not His body; His body was still present before all when He said that. Jesus often spoke in figurative language. When He said, "I am the door" (John 10:9), He meant that He was the only channel through which people could enter into eternal life. He wasn't literally a door. The parables He told are clear examples of common things used to represent spiritual realities. The failure of some Jews to understand the figurative, metaphorical sense in which Jesus spoke of His body and blood caused them to stop following Him (John 6:53-66).

3. The significance of the Supper (vv. 23c-25)

a) The bread and the body (vv. 23c-24)"The Lord Jesus . . . took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, Take, eat; this is my body which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. ""Had given thanks" is from the Greek verb euchariste[ma]o. The English transliteration, Eucharist, is the name some Christians use to refer to the Lord's Supper. The bread that had represented the Exodus now came to represent the body of the Lord. As the body to the Jewish mind represented the whole person, so the reference to Christ's body here symbolized His entire incarnation from His birth to His resurrection. Christ was born, crucified, and resurrected as a sacrificial gift given to mankind. The Greek word translated "broken" doesn't appear in the better Greek manuscripts. The omission of that word is in keeping with John 19:33, 36. Those verses tell us that when soldiers came to break Jesus' legs (a common Roman practice to mercifully hasten the death of crucifixion victims), they noticed He was already dead and therefore didn't break them, thus fulfilling the Scripture, "A bone of him shall not be broken" (cf. , Ps. 34:20; Ex. 12:46).

It Was for You

When Jesus said, "This is my body, which is for you," He was proclaiming that He was giving His life as the incarnate Son of God for you. The words "for you" reveal the unbelievably gracious sacrifice of God in sending His Son. He became a man for you, He suffered for you, and He died for you. Was it for Himself that He was subjected to the hatred and mockery of people who rejected Him and plotted His death? Why did He go to the Garden of Gethsemane, pouring out His heart in anguish, and choose to fulfill His Father's will? Was it for Himself? No. It was for you. What an magnanimous act of divine love! Even though you don't deserve it, He still gave His life for you. Whether you want to accept the sacrifice of Christ on your behalf is your choice, but that does not change the fact that His life was given for you. The benefit of Christ's death is offered to everyone since it paid for the sin of all men. And Christ still lives as a sympathetic high priest for you, who can identify with your suffering and offer divine comfort (Heb. 4:15-16). Not only did He die for you, but He rose and lives forevermore for you.

In response to all He has done for us, Christ asks us to remember Him and what He has accomplished. Sharing in Communion is not an option for believers; it is a command from the Lord Himself. To neglect the Lord's Supper is to be disobedient. Jesus didn't specify how often you should take Communion, but when your church offers it you should take it. That doesn't mean you can't observe it more often if you'd like. You can share in Communion in your home, in a prayer group, or at a Bible study. The important thing is that you do it.

The concept of remembering in the Hebrew mind meant more than simply recalling something that happened in the past. It meant recapturing as much of the reality and significance of a person or situation as possible in one's conscious mind. Jesus was requesting that Christians ponder the meaning of His life and death on their behalf. A person can participate in Communion, but if his mind is a million miles away, he hasn't truly remembered the Lord.

b) The cup and the covenant (v. 25)"After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do, as often as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. "Taking the third cup of Passover after the meal had been finished, Jesus stated that the cup of wine represented the New Covenant (Gk. , diath[ma]lek[ma]e) or promise that would soon be ratified by His blood. The Old Covenant was ratified by the blood of animals, and the New by the blood of Christ. In the same way that a signature with ink ratifies a contract or promise today, shedding the blood of a sacrificial animal ratified one in the Old Testament. God promised not to take the lives of the Israelites' firstborn and to lead them out of Egypt to the Promised Land if they would agree to sign on the dotted line, so to speak, with the blood of a lamb smeared on the doorposts and the lintel of their homes. The practice of ratifying a covenant with the blood of an

animal was common not only in the Old Testament, but in most of the Ancient Near East. Whereas the Old Covenant required continual animal sacrifices, the New Covenant, represented by the cup of Communion, was fulfilled by the once-for-all sacrifice of the Lamb of God for the forgiveness of sins for all time (Heb. 9:28). It was as if on the cross Jesus was taking His blood and signing on the dotted line. It looked beyond the temporal blessings of the Old Covenant to the eternal blessings of the New Covenant. The blood of the Passover has been replaced by the blood of the cross. Every time we celebrate the Lord's Supper we are declaring God's provision of salvation and renewing our faith in Him.

B. The Propitiation Proclaimed (v. 26)

"As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come. "

We proclaim the death of Christ every time we remember Him in Communion. The world is reminded that God became man and died a substitutionary sin-atoning death for all mankind (cf. 1 John 2:2). We also look forward to the day when we will commune with Him in His presence. The Lord's Table is a comprehensive ordinance. In it we remember what Christ has done, we refresh our commitment to Him, we commune with Him, we proclaim the gospel, and we anticipate His return. That is why we must observe it with the right attitude.

III. THE PREPARATION FOR THE LORD'S SUPPER (vv. 27-34)

A. The Conviction of Unworthy Communion (vv. 27-28)

1. Analyzed (v. 27a)

"Wherefore, whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily"

The Corinthians were partaking of Communion in an unworthy manner. We can too in any of several ways:

a) By ignoring it rather than obeying it. If we say it is irrelevant and unimportant, we are observing it unworthily. b) By failing to observe it meaningfully. We can be more concerned with going through the ritualistic motions without understanding the reason for doing it. Superficial ceremony and irreverence can prevent us from personally experiencing communion with Christ. c) By assuming it can save you. Taking Communion does not impart saving grace. It is the privilege of those who are already saved to confront their sin and renew their fellowship with Christ. d) By refusing to confess and repent from your sin. You should never participate in the Lord's Supper if you have unresolved bitterness toward another Christian or any unconfessed sin in your life. e) By having a lack of respect and love for God or His children.

2. Applied (v. 27b)

"Shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. "

The result of coming to the Lord's Table unworthily is that you are guilty of treating Christ's unique life and death as something common and insignificant. A man who tramples on his nation's flag isn't merely trampling on a piece of cloth; he is guilty of dishonoring his country. Likewise, someone who tramples on the body and blood of Christ, as represented in the elements of Communion, is guilty of dishonoring Christ Himself. Communion is a real encounter with Christ. It's so real that failure to acknowledge the reality behind it brings about judgment (v. 29).

3. Avoided (v. 28)

"But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. "

The Greek word translated "examine" conveys the idea of a rigorous self-examination. Check out your life--your motives and your attitudes toward the Lord, His Table, and other Christians. We need to be certain we're not careless, flippant, indifferent, unrepentant, or irreverent when we partake of Communion. We must examine our hearts to discover if there's anything that shouldn't be there. When we have examined ourselves and dealt with any sin or improper motive, then we are ready to share in the bread and the cup.

B. The Consequence of Unworthy Communion (vv. 29-32)

1. The cause of chastening (v. 29)

"He that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. "

The Greek word translated "judgment" is krima and is better translated "chastisement. " It refers to the Lord's chastisement of believers, not the damnation of unbelievers, which is referred to in verse 32 with the Greek term katakrin[ma]o. A believer fails to discern the Lord's body when he disregards the reality of Christ in Communion and treats the ordinance with a lack of seriousness, dignity, or sacredness. Such a person has not discerned the meaning and significance of the Lord's body. Although a reference to the corporate body of Christ may be implied in this verse, the context better supports a reference to the Lord Himself.

2. The results of chastening (vv. 30-31)

a) Administered (v. 30)"For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. "The Lord disciplined the Corinthians' abuse of the Lord's Supper by causing some to be sick, and taking the lives of others. The Greek word translated "sleep" is a common New Testament metaphor for the death of believers (John 11:11; Acts 7:60; 1 Thess. 4:13-15). A sufficient number in Corinth had died for partaking of the Lord's Supper in an irreverent manner. In a similar way God put to death Ananias and Sapphira for lying to the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1- 11). Such stark reminders of God's holiness and man's sinfulness show what all men deserve and what some actually receive. Some Christians today have quite possibly become weak and sick, or have died as a result of incorrectly observing the Lord's Supper. b) Avoided (v. 31)"If we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. "Paul is saying that if we examine ourselves, we wouldn't end up being chastened. Instead of following the example of the Corinthians, who were chastened by God because they wouldn't examine themselves, we need to acknowledge and confess our sins and evaluate the purity of our motives as we take Communion.

3. The reason for chastening (v. 32)

"But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. "

At this point some Christians might hesitate coming to the Lord's Table for fear of getting a divine zap. However Paul assures us that although we might be chastened by the Lord, we will not be damned with the world. No Christian under any circumstance will ever be damned with the world because short of that he will be chastened by the Lord. The Greek word translated "chastened" is used of a father's discipline of his child (cf. Eph. 6:4). God disciplines His children not to punish them, but to correct their sinful behavior and direct them in the paths of righteousness. Hebrews 12:6 says, "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son he receiveth. " Every Christian is under the chastening hand of the Lord, which prevents him from ever being condemned with the world. So we don't have to fear losing our salvation and being eternally separated from the presence of God. God will intervene with His chastening hand before that could ever happen.

C. The Correction of Unworthy Communion (vv. 33-34)

"Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another. And if any man hunger, let him eat at home, that ye come not together unto judgment. And the rest will I set in order when I come. "

Paul instructs the Corinthians to wait for each other when they congregate for the love feast and the Lord's Supper rather than selfishly gorging themselves before the poor arrive. Those who were attending to satisfy their physical hunger were to eat at home. Otherwise they would pervert the purpose of the love feast and the Lord's Supper and would be subject to divine chastening.

I don't know what the rest of the problems were that the Corinthians had, but they were most likely related to matters of worship or remaining issues about the Lord's Supper that could be dealt with when he personally arrived in Corinth.

The Lord is very serious about how the ordinance of Communion is to be treated. We must never

overlook its significance or fail to evaluate our hearts before we partake of it.

Focusing on the Facts

1. What did Jesus mean by claiming to be the Bread of Life? How did those who heard Him interpret His statements?
2. How is 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 like a diamond in a muddy road?
3. Identify the source of Paul's instruction about the Lord's Supper?
4. Explain the significance of the Lord's Supper being instituted on the night of Jesus' betrayal and on Passover.
5. How has Jesus' identification of the bread and wine as His body and blood been misinterpreted today? How can the Greek verb estin ("to be") also be translated?
6. What does the reference to Christ's body (symbolized by the bread) represent?
7. In response to all Christ has done for us, what did He ask us to do?
8. Compare how the Old and New Covenants were ratified?
9. What do Christians silently proclaim when they participate in the Lord's Supper?
10. List some ways in which a person could partake of Communion in an unworthy manner.
11. In what sense can a Christian be "guilty of the body and blood of the Lord" (1 Cor. 11:27)?
12. How can a Christian avoid dishonoring Christ in Communion?
13. What does a failure to discern the significance of the Lord's sacrificial life and death result in (1 Cor. 11:29)?
14. What kind of chastening did some of the Corinthians receive (1 Cor. 11:30)?
15. What did Paul instruct the Corinthians to do to correct their abuses and prevent being judged (1 Cor. 11:31)?
16. Compare the chastening the believer receives with the judgment the unbeliever receives (1 Cor. 11:32).

Pondering the Principles

1. Do you have Jewish friends, neighbors, relatives, or co-workers who have not yet recognized Christ as the Jewish Messiah? Although this chapter has touched upon some of the significance of the Passover that was fulfilled by Christ, there are other fascinating parallels. Find some study materials at a Christian bookstore, a church or Christian school library, or an ministry outreach to Jewish people that can help you prepare to share with them how Christ has become their Passover lamb.
2. Look over the variety of ways the Lord's Supper can be treated unworthily (see p. xx). Examining your own life, do you find yourself guilty of anything on that list? If so, after confessing your sin to the Lord, what steps do you need to take to correct that situation? In 1 Corinthians 11 Paul tells us to examine ourselves (vv. 28, 31), discern the significance of the Lord's life and death (v. 29), and participate in the Lord's Supper for the right reasons (v. 34). With your family or a Christian friend, discuss how you can highlight the importance of the next celebration of Communion. Consider reading appropriate passages of Scripture together, like those about Christ's crucifixion or return. Find out when your church will be celebrating Communion next and put it on your calendar to be sure you don't miss it. Beforehand and on the way to church be asking the Lord to reveal any sin you have not yet confessed. Then during the service, fight any temptation to daydream. Make a conscious effort to ponder Christ's life and death on your behalf. Look upon Communion as a you would a reunion with an close friend or relative you haven't seen for a long while. The unique spiritual encounter of a Christian with his living Lord and Savior is reunion well worth preparing for.

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