

The Lord's Supper

This is the first written record of the institution of the Lord's supper. The emphasis throughout is on the Lordship of Christ. Why? The Corinthians were guilty of treating the supper in a careless manner. They needed reminding that the supper is the Lord's. It belongs to Him and must be observed in His appointed way. There are **five** symbols in Christianity: baptism; covered and uncovered heads; and the bread and cup. The bread and the cup are *not* types (which point *forward*) but rather symbols which encourage us to look *backward*, to a reality already accomplished, and *upward*, until the Lord comes.

1 Corinthians 11.17-22: Irregularities at the Supper

17 Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse. **18** For first of all, when ye come together in ~~the~~ church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. **19** For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you. Paul has been able to praise the Corinthians in v.2, but in the following directives (vv.17-34) **no** praise can be given. Their gatherings were doing more harm than good! Rather than 'assembling together' for spiritual benefit, their meetings were actually causing spiritual deterioration. How? **v.18:** There were 'splits', like the tearing of a garment, and 'schisms' between the believers. In 1.10 these divisions were **doctrinal**; here they are **social** (rich and poor). What a sad denial of their unity and fellowship in Christ. They came together *outwardly* as one (v.20) and yet *internally* they were divided. **v.19:** This is a difficult verse to interpret. There were not only 'splits' (v.18) but also 'heresies' among them. The word 'heresies' comes from a verb meaning 'to choose' and thus there were those at Corinth who followed a 'self-willed choice' tending to division and separation. The same word is used of: a work of the flesh (Galatians 5.20), false and destructive teaching (2 Peter 2.1) and the sects of the Sadducees and Pharisees (Acts 5.17, 15.5). According to Paul these 'heresies' were a necessity in order that those who stand against them and seek the unity of God's people would be made manifest and 'approved'. **FF Bruce:** *So that the genuine may be distinguished from the counterfeit.*

20 When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper. **21** For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken. **22** What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, ~~and~~ (by) shaming them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not. 'Therefore' continues the thought of 'gathering together' and explains the divisions among the believers. They were 'coming together' but 'not to eat the Lord's supper', i.e. they were not doing what they professed to do. It wasn't possible to keep the Lord's supper because of the disorder and divisions amongst them. **v.21:** It would seem that the practice of the church at Corinth was to gather for a 'love feast' during which the Lord's supper would be observed. This should have been a time of mutual fellowship and sharing of one's provisions, but it seems the rich were arriving 'before' the poor and eating 'their own' sumptuous provisions even becoming 'drunk' in the process. When the poor arrived they were 'hungry'. *A loveless love feast!* The gathering had therefore lost its true character and original meaning; it could no longer be called the Lord's supper. **v.22:** Paul's abhorrence of the situation was clear. There is a place for eating and drinking when one is hungry and thirsty – at home! By not *waiting* for or *sharing* their bounty with the poor, the rich were 'shaming' or 'humiliating' those who had nothing. This showed how little they valued ('despised') the local assembly by destroying the unity of the company. The fellowship of the local church counted for nothing in their eyes. Clearly, in all of these matters there was nothing for which Paul could commend them.

Note the use of the phrase 'Lord's (*kuriakos*) supper' suggesting He is the author and subject of it (cf. Revelation 1.10). *Lord's supper* and *breaking of bread* are the same event viewed from different perspectives. Viewed from the **Lord's perspective**, the supper is His and we are invited guests (suggests dignity). Viewed from **our perspective**, it is a privilege to participate individually in the breaking of bread.

1 Corinthians 11.23-26: Institution of the Supper

23 For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: **24** And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, ~~Take, eat:~~ *this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in (unto) remembrance of me.* As Paul seeks to put the disorder at Corinth right, he takes them back to first principles. The supper was instituted on the Passover night in which the Lord was 'being betrayed' (*perfect* tense). This would remind the Corinthians of the solemnity of the supper and contrast their careless attitude. Paul received the details about the institution of the supper by revelation from the Lord (cf. 1 Corinthians 15.3, Galatians 1.12). **v.24:** On that Passover night (see Matthew 26.26, Mark 14.22, Luke 22.19), the Lord Jesus took bread (*artos*, meaning any loaf of bread), i.e. one of the Passover loaves, and, after giving thanks, gave it a new significance. Rather than now signifying the affliction of Egypt (Deuteronomy 16.3), the Lord used it as a **symbol** of His body. 'This is my

body' did not mean that the bread was *literally* His body or *became* His body, rather it **represented** His body just as the 'field' in the parable of the tares represented the world (Matthew 13.38). So the bread symbolises His body 'given' (not 'broken', see Luke 22.19) for us in death. We are commanded to *continue* to 'give thanks' and 'brake' the bread in remembrance of **Him**. Moses exhorted Israel to remember the day of their deliverance from Egypt (Exodus 13.3). The Day of Atonement brought the sins of a nation vividly to mind (Hebrews 10.3). But, at the Lord's supper we remember, not a day, but a **Person**; not sins, but the **One** who died to put them away! Every prayer, hymn, and reading should be focussed on Him.

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 ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.* **26** For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. Likewise the Lord Jesus took the 'cup' and blessed it after 'he had supped', i.e. after the Passover supper was ended (Matthew 26.27, Mark 14.23, Luke 22.20). This is significant as it suggests that the Lord's supper was **distinct** from, and indeed has **superseded** the Passover supper. 'The cup' is a figure of speech (*metonymy*) for its contents, i.e. the wine. It symbolises the 'new covenant' which has been ratified by the blood of the Lord Jesus (as also the old covenant, Exodus 24.8). The 'new' covenant is new not only in age but also in *nature* and *character*. The old covenant required the obedience of the covenant people; the new covenant depends solely on God. Whilst it will be established with Israel in a coming day (Jeremiah 31.31-34), every believer of the church age presently enjoys its spiritual blessings given their relationship with One who died to establish it (see Hebrews 8.6-13, 10.16-18). Like the bread, we are to give thanks for, and drink of the cup in remembrance of the Lord Jesus 'as often' as the Lord's supper is kept. This should be on the first day of the week (Acts 20.7). **v.26:** In giving thanks for and partaking of the symbols we 'shew', 'proclaim' or 'preach' the Lord's death 'during the time until He comes'. This is a verbal announcement of the death of Christ to the unseen angelic realm (11.10) and any unsaved or unlearned present (14.16, 23).

1 Corinthians 11.27-34: Instructions for the Supper

It is important to note that this section divides into **two**. Verses 27-32 give practical instruction in response to the **institution** (vv.23-26), whilst vv.33-34 are the directions in response to the **irregularities** (vv.17-22). **27** *Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.* **28** *But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.* **29** *For he that eateth and drinketh (unworthily), eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.* **30** *For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.* **31** *For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged.* **32** *But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.* So then, given the gravity, solemnity and significance of the supper, it is unacceptable to partake of the 'bread' and 'cup' in an 'improper' or 'careless' manner. The Corinthians' attitude towards the **supper** was wrong, treating it irreverently, having no real understanding of the purpose of their gathering (vv.20-21). Their attitude towards **each other** was also wrong denying the unity and fellowship of the local church which the supper symbolises (vv.21-22). As such they were 'guilty' or 'to be held accountable' for sin *in respect of* the Person of Christ (see v.30). Treating the supper with indifference is to treat the Saviour with indifference. **v.28:** How great the need then to 'examine ourselves'. We are to personally test our attitude and behaviour towards the supper and each other in order that we might partake worthily (properly). Preparation is required for the Lord's supper. Is there unconfessed sin? A bitter attitude towards another believer? **v.29:** The one who partakes in a 'careless' manner is passing a 'sentence of God's governmental judgment' against 'himself' because they have failed to 'discern' or 'make a distinction' between what is common and what is holy. They have failed to recognise the significance of the symbols and what they represent, i.e. the Lord Himself. This judgment is the **chastening** of a loving Father for his erring child. **v.30:** As such some were 'weak' and afflicted with 'illness'. Some had even died. **MacDonald:** *A loving Father loves us too dearly to allow us to go on in sin. Thus we soon feel the shepherd's crook on our necks pulling us back to Himself. It is possible for the saints to be fit for heaven (in Christ) but not fitted to remain on the earth in testimony.* **vv.31-32:** Again the apostle exhorts that if we would only 'judge' or 'discern' for ourselves how our attitude and behaviour needed changing we would not come under the chastening hand of the Lord. Note. The motive of His chastening is love (Hebrews 12.6) and His goal is holiness (Hebrews 12.10). The fact of our chastening is also proof that we shall not be 'condemned' with the world.

33 *Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another.* **34** *And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come.* Paul's instructions in response to the irregularities at the supper (vv.17-22) are simple. When the believers came together for a love feast they were to 'wait' for, 'receive' and 'welcome' each other. **v.34:** If anyone was so hungry that they couldn't wait for other believers then they should eat at home before the gathering. In this way their participation in the meal, which included the Lord's supper, would be focussed on its significance and fellowship rather than satisfying their hunger. In this way they would avoid the Lord's chastening hand upon them. There was more for the apostle Paul to correct, but the highly significant matters of headship (11.2-16) and lordship (11.17-34) could not wait!