

## SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT

**I COR. 11:20** 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 shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise *you* not.

**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 remembrance of me.

**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.

**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.

**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.

### NOTES

# Thoughts on the Lord's Supper

Lesson Text: I Corinthians 11:20-34

Related Scriptures: Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24;  
Luke 22:17-20; I Corinthians 10:14-22

TIME: A.D. 55

PLACE: from Ephesus

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**GOLDEN TEXT**—"For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come" (I Corinthians 11:26).

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## *Lesson Exposition*

### **REBUKE FOR SELFISHNESS— I Cor. 11:20-22**

**Paul's contention (I Cor. 11:20-21).** Division was an ongoing problem in the Corinthian church in more ways than one. As we have studied, some were divided over their favorite preachers while others were divided over the exercise of Christian liberty when it came to eating food offered to idols.

Another area of division came in the observance of the Lord's Supper (vs. 18). Not surprisingly, economic status varied in the church, as the gospel was preached to both the wealthy and the poor. Dividing lines were drawn between the rich and the poor at the Lord's Supper, with the rich gorging themselves while the poor were being shut out. Word got back to Paul that they were not serving the Lord's Supper in a loving way, and this caused him to issue a stern rebuke to the church.

When the church would gather, there would typically be a common meal served for everyone to enjoy and participate in. The meal that was served was called the "Lord's Supper," as the bread and the cup were featured in it. But Paul

points out that the people were not really eating the Lord's Supper, regardless of what they called it. Nothing about what the Corinthians were doing even closely resembled what Christ would have approved of or practiced Himself.

**Paul's rebuke (I Cor. 11:22).** Paul was alarmed at what he had heard concerning the observance of the Lord's Supper. He asked the church why they were using this community meal as an opportunity to eat like they would at home. He points out that when they gathered together, it was supposed to be for a greater purpose than a regular meal. They were to share so that everyone could partake equally.

To treat the poor in such a contemptible way was to despise the church of God and humiliate the poor. God had always commanded that those with means should care for the poor and not treat them as second-class citizens (cf. Jas. 2:1-7). In Paul's mind, the Corinthians' selfish practices were repulsive, and he set out to remind them of what the Lord's Supper was really all about.

## **THE BODY AND THE BLOOD—**

**I Cor. 11:23-26**

**The revelation entrusted to Paul (I Cor. 11:23).** As upset as Paul may have been with the Corinthians' behavior, he was not content with just shaming them with his rebuke and leaving them to their sin. They needed to be instructed on how to conduct themselves at the Lord's table. This is not to say that he had never given them proper teaching on this issue, but he felt it necessary to teach them again.

Paul had received instructions on the Lord's Supper from Jesus Himself. He was not taught this by anyone else, nor did he formulate his own directives. Christ taught him, and he passed that teaching on to the Corinthians. For them to disobey Paul was the same as disobeying God, since this was Jesus' own teaching on this matter.

**The body (I Cor. 11:24).** At the very first communion service, Jesus gave thanks and broke the bread apart (cf. Luke 22:19). Just as He gave thanks to God for the bread, we must give thanks to God for giving us His only Son, the Bread of Life (John 6:35). It is this Living Bread that sustains us throughout our lives and gives us life eternal.

The bread that was broken was symbolic of the fact that Jesus' own body would be ravaged just hours later. He gave His body for us, and we are to eat the bread in remembrance of Him.

**The blood (I Cor. 11:25-26).** After distributing the broken pieces of bread, Jesus then took the cup. The cup represents the blood of Jesus and introduces the new covenant between God and His people, one which we are still under today. Jesus made a new covenant and ratified it with His blood.

Just as we eat the bread in remembrance of Jesus, we also drink the cup in remembrance of Him. We proclaim the death of Christ by eating the bread and drinking the cup, and the church

is to continue this practice until Christ returns. When we partake of communion, our minds must be focused on Jesus and the sacrifice He made for us.

## **SELF-EXAMINATION—**

**I Cor. 11:27-34**

**Reverence in communion (I Cor. 11:27-28).** Communion is an event so holy that one must partake in it carefully. To partake in communion unworthily is to treat it as ordinary food and drink without giving any thought to what it means. To eat and drink unworthily in this way is to totally disrespect Christ, making one guilty of despising the body and blood of Jesus. Disrespecting others at the Lord's Supper is bad enough, but disparaging the sacrificial work of Jesus on our behalf is horrendous.

In order to avoid such a disgrace from occurring, Paul calls on each person to examine himself, to make sure he is remembering and honoring the Lord for what He did. Communion should also be seen as an opportunity to discover any unconfessed sin and to repent of it. To save us from sin, after all, is the very reason Jesus gave His life.

**Purpose of communion (I Cor. 11:29-30).** Communion itself does not bring salvation. In fact, taking communion without being saved brings judgment, not salvation. Communion is reserved for those who are saved, not for the unrepentant sinner.

The negative consequences of taking communion in an unworthy manner are more than just spiritual. Paul points out that there were physical consequences in the Corinthian church. Many in the church had become sick and even died for partaking in a sinful way. This was the way the Lord disciplined the Corinthians for their disrespect, and we should not think that we modern Christians are immune to such discipline, although it does not always happen that way.

**Evaluation for communion (I Cor. 11:31-32).** There is an element of personal responsibility involved here that cannot be overlooked. The warning against not partaking in communion in an unworthy manner is not a suggestion that we should not participate at all. In fact, God wants us to come to His table and enjoy the blessings He has prepared for us.

If we are honest in our judgment of ourselves, we will not be considered unworthy by God. He wants to forgive us, but we must repent. That is why the time of self-examination and honest judgment prior to communion is so important.

When God judges a believer this way, it does not mean he is sent to hell. Judgment in this case refers to God's discipline. As a loving parent, He disciplines us in order to correct wrong behavior or a bad attitude. The idea is to bring us to repentance and obedience, not to cast us away. God's discipline itself is a blessing, as it brings us back into right fellowship with Him and keeps us from having hard hearts like the world. As Paul says, believers are not judged the same as the world (vs. 32). Because of our faith in Jesus, believers are not condemned (cf. Rom. 8:1).

Those who have repented do not need to be afraid to take communion. If you have confessed your sin and take the bread and the cup in remembrance of the Lord, you are free to enjoy the benefits of this blessed event.

**Love in communion (I Cor. 11:33-34).** After reminding the church what the Lord's Supper was all about, Paul then instructs them to wait for one another when they share the meal. It was not wrong for them to have the meal, nor was it wrong for them to enjoy the meal, since it was customary at that time. They were simply to enjoy it together in love, humility, and harmony.

Then Paul gives a fairly practical suggestion. He says that if a person is so hungry that he cannot wait for the rest of the church to gather together, that person should eat at home. When we gather as a church, we should do everything we can to be prepared for serving others, whether this means making sure we are not hungry or just getting enough sleep. These practical things will make us better servants in the body of Christ.

The Lord's Supper is about the Lord, not us. When we partake of it, we should do so in a way that will bring glory to Him.

—Robert Ferguson, Jr.

## QUESTIONS

1. What was causing division in the Corinthian church regarding the Lord's Supper?
2. Why does Paul tell the Corinthian church they were not actually eating the Lord's Supper?
3. What was Paul's attitude toward those who were being selfish at the Lord's Supper?
4. Where did Paul receive his instructions concerning the Lord's Supper?
5. What is represented by the bread?
6. What is represented by the cup?
7. What do we proclaim when we partake of the bread and the cup?
8. What does eating and drinking in an unworthy manner mean?
9. What was the consequence of the Corinthians' partaking of communion unworthily?
10. What is the purpose of God's discipline of a believer?

—Robert Ferguson, Jr.

## PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Be careful to honor God with pure motives in worship, service, and fellowship (I Cor. 11:20-22).
2. Our faith grows deeper whenever we remember Christ's sacrifice for our sins (vss. 23-24).
3. Our faith and worship look forward to Christ's coming in glory (vss. 25-26).
4. Instead of being drawn away from Him by guilt, believers should always draw closer to Christ for forgiveness and restoration (vss. 27-29).
5. Believers invite unintended consequences when their worship is careless (vss. 30-32).
6. We should gather for worship in love and consideration for all our fellow believers (vss. 33-34).

—Cheryl Y. Powell.

## RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

1. How might the issues raised by Paul in I Corinthians 11:1-19 have contributed to the problems in their love feasts and their observances of the Lord's Supper? Discuss.
2. What atmosphere is appropriate for observing the Lord's Supper today? Discuss.
3. How should we confront the issue of selfishness in a congregation?
4. What does it mean to partake of the Lord's Supper unworthily?

—Cheryl Y. Powell.

## Golden Text Illuminated

**“For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come” (I Corinthians 11:26).**

Because there were no first-century church buildings, believers gathered in the homes of wealthy members, since those dwellings would be large enough to accommodate the gatherings. Appallingly, some at Corinth were getting drunk during the love feast! Paul also had learned that others were going hungry. Either the rich were devouring the food before the poorer members arrived, or they were excluding the poor from access to their sumptuous meals.

Against these abuses, Paul reiterates what he had already taught the Corinthians, which Christ himself had revealed: “For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you” (I Cor. 11:23). Paul stresses the solemnity of the Lord's Supper by mentioning the betrayal of Jesus on the night that He took the bread and cup. In stark contrast to the selfishness of the Corinthians at their feasts, Jesus generously shared food and wine with His disciples.

Paul sounded a stern warning about the abuse of the Lord's Supper. In the previous chapter (vs. 7), he reminded them of the story in Exodus 32:1-6 to examine their consciences before they receive the bread and the cup.

The Lord's Supper is actually a visible sermon to the world. In sharing the bread and cup, the church preaches the sacrificial death of Jesus, as well as His future glorious return.

—Mark Winter.