

Understanding the Lord's Supper – Part 3

1 Corinthians 11:23-28

Introduction:

1. The Lord's Supper is designed to be a blessing to the corporate body of believers as they come together and focus on their Savior and His accomplishments.
2. The church at Corinth had turned it into a carnival. They were bringing great reproach to Christ by making a mockery out of the Lord's Supper.
3. The Corinthians' corporate behavior in the local assembly contradicted the very essence of what the cross is supposed to represent.
 - They were having church dinners before observing the Lord's Supper.
 - The rich were shaming the poor. The rich were flaunting their wealth by being gluttons and even getting drunk in the local assembly.
 - There were divisions within the assembly, creating contention and strife.
4. Paul said, "...shall I praise you in this? I praise you not." Beginning in verse 23, Paul will bring some much needed teaching, rebuke, and warning to this carnal church.
5. This is a wonderful text in which Paul explains the meaning of the Lord's Supper to the church, the body of Christ. This is the only passage where Paul deals with the details of the Lord's Supper and its meaning.
6. The Lord's Supper is not a magical, mystical, spooky religious ritual that many religions have made it today. Every believer must understand the true meaning of the Lord's Supper. Let's examine four truths from this text.

The Lord's Supper was delivered from Paul to the church. vs. 23

1. Paul makes it clear that he received directly from the Lord what he is about to share with the church. vs. 23
2. Paul would not have been present when Christ met with the twelve in the upper room and observed what is commonly known as "the last supper."
 - This took place the night Judas Iscariot betrayed Christ and the night before Christ died on the cross.
 - Jesus enjoyed the Passover meal with the twelve (**Matthew 26:19**) and as they were eating, Jesus took the bread and juice and blessed it (**Matthew 26:26**).
 - Paul, of course, was not there; so, Christ gives Paul direct revelation concerning this event and Paul in turn gives it to the predominantly Gentile church.
3. Why was Israel given this observance (through the twelve) **and** the Gentile church (through Paul)? We know that most of Israel's laws, commandments, and observances were not required of the Gentile believers. **Acts 15:19; Colossians 2:16**
4. The reason why the Lord's Supper was given to both Israel and the body of Christ is because of what it represents. It represents the cross work of Jesus Christ at Calvary.
 - The **prophetic** program calls for an earthly kingdom to be given to Israel in which all their sins will be forgiven. **Hebrews 8:8-12; Acts 3:19-21**

- The **mystery** program today calls for a heavenly body of believers (body of Christ) who are also forgiven of all their sins (**Ephesians 1:7**) and blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ (**Ephesians 1:3**).
 - Whether it's Israel in the future, or the body of Christ today, all of God's blessings flow to people directly through the cross work of Jesus Christ.
5. Israel will receive all of their blessings because of the cross and we receive all of our blessings today because of the cross; therefore, we both share this memorial which rejoices in the finished work of our Savior.

**The Lord's Supper is a remembrance of Christ's finished work on the cross.
vs. 24-25**

1. The Lord's Supper is exactly what Paul told the church. It is a **remembrance**.
2. There is something in sinful mankind that wants to be able to perform an outward action and based on that action receive God's favor.
3. This is exactly what many religions have made the Lord's Supper. It has become a spooky, mysterious ritual that somehow brings to the observer God's favor. Here are some examples as cited by Nelson's Bible Dictionary:
 - **The transubstantiation view** (the Roman Catholic view) - this view holds that the bread and juice become the actual body and blood of Christ when words of institution are spoken by the priest.
 - **The consubstantiation view** (developed by Martin Luther) - Christ's body and blood are truly present in, with, and under the bread and juice. They do not actually change into Christ's body and blood, but Christ is present in the elements.
 - **The dynamic view** (view of John Calvin) - Christ is not physically present in the elements, but He is dynamically and spiritually present in the Lord's Supper through the Holy Spirit. Christ actually gives spiritual nourishment from His own glorified body to those who receive it. Calvin admitted it was a mystery and couldn't explain how it happened.
4. Isn't it amazing how complicated religion can make things? Religion loves the mysterious (many times its practices go back to the ancient Babylonian mysteries, pagan practices that have been Christianized). If you can't explain it, you keep your followers in bondage and keep them coming back.
 - If a church leader praying or chanting over the elements mysteriously turns them into something else, then this keeps people coming back. You have created something they have to have to be right with God.
5. Let's turn to **Luke 22:14-21** and clear away the fog of religion.
 - Jesus is eating the Passover meal with the twelve. vs. 14-18
 - He holds up some bread and juice, gives it to them and tells them what it represents.
 - This is clearly symbolic. You know it's not His physical body because His physical body is holding the bread. You know it is not His literal blood because His blood is inside His body. vs. 19-20
 - **John 6:35** makes it clear that eating and drinking of Christ is coming to Him and believing on Him. To eat Christ's flesh literally would be cannibalism and to drink His blood would be contrary to the law of Moses.

- We always take the Bible literally unless something is obviously symbolic. There are many things in the Bible that are obviously symbolic **by their context. Jeremiah 15:16; John 1:29, 10:7-9**
 - We speak this way all the time. We sit in church and say, "I'm freezing or I'm burning up" or, "When I leave church I have to fly home."
 - It is so obvious that Jesus is speaking symbolically of His body and blood when He held up that piece of bread and cup. Only religion could confuse it.
 - If this bread and juice somehow mysteriously became His body and blood, it sure didn't help Judas. This would mean that Judas assimilated Christ's body and blood into himself and then immediately went out and betrayed Him and hung himself. vs. 21
6. Clearly the bread and juice is supposed to **represent** something. It is a remembrance. It is to remind us of something.
 - The broken bread is to remind us of Christ's broken body that He gave to be mutilated and hung on a tree to bear our sins. **1 Corinthians 11:24**
 - The fruit of the vine (the juice) is to remind us of the blood that He gave for our redemption. **1 Corinthians 11:25**
 7. The Lord's Supper is a remembrance, pure and simple. It cannot bring you any kind of divine blessing, favor, or grace. Why is this? Because we **already possess** all blessings, all favor and all grace in Christ. **Colossians 2:10** tells us that we are complete in Christ.
 8. As we receive and partake of the bread and juice, it is a reminder to us that we have received and partaken of Christ and that all the spiritual blessings we possess are due to the finished and completed work of Jesus Christ on the cross.
 9. When you come to Jesus and believe on Him, you become one with Jesus Christ (**Ephesians 5:30-32**). You are **in Christ!**
 10. What possible necessity would there be for a believer to mysteriously partake of Christ's body and blood (by means of physical food) when they have already been made one with Him (by faith)? **Galatians 3:26-29**
 - This would mean that we didn't get all of Christ when we got saved, we only got part of Him. So, I need to take this physical food so I can get the rest of Him.
 - Or it would mean that I got Him, but I lost Him, so now I have to take this physical food so I can get Him back. Then, each week I have to keep coming back and taking this food again so I can get Him back again. So, I keep receiving Him and losing Him.
 - The Bible knows nothing of this kind of thinking.
 11. When you believe on Christ, you become a member of His body. You become one with Him. The Bible says that you are "in Christ" and Christ is "in you!" **Colossians 1:2, 27**

The Lord's Supper is an outward demonstration of our faith in Christ. vs. 26

1. Paul told the church that when they partake of the Lord's Supper they show the Lord's death till he comes.
 - The word "shew" means "to proclaim." It is also translated in other places as "preach, declare."

2. As we partake of the Lord's Supper we are declaring or preaching a message. We are proclaiming that we have been to Calvary and partaken of Christ.
3. We are declaring that we believe that it's the cross-work of Christ (bearing our sins and shedding His blood to provide our forgiveness) that saves us and provides a complete salvation.
4. Paul says that every time we do this (as often as...); we are declaring His finished work.
5. Notice Paul does not lay down hard fast rules about this observance. He doesn't say how often or what time of the week or who should hand it out or how it should be distributed, or how much bread and juice you should eat and drink, etc.
 - He leaves all of this up to the local assembly.
 - It is the mysticism of religion that says, "This is the way you have to do it or there won't be any grace or favor bestowed upon you."
6. Notice Paul said that we proclaim His finished work "*till he come.*"
 - So this wasn't a dispensational issue that would eventually cease, such as the sign gifts.
 - Paul never said to speak in tongues "*till he come.*" In fact he said that tongues shall cease. **1 Corinthians 13:8**
 - The Lord's Supper is something that the body of Christ does to proclaim Christ's finished work and we do until Christ returns for us.

The Lord's Supper is to be observed in a worthy manner. vs. 27

1. This verse has brought fear to many hearts and caused much consternation among believers to the point that they are fearful to observe the Lord's Supper. They are afraid that God is going to zap them if they haven't been living perfect.
2. As we have reiterated time and time again, every verse must be considered in light of the context in which it is found.
3. Let's remember what was going on in Corinth.
 - Believers were publicly associating themselves with the pagan altars of idolatry and then coming down the street to church and observing the Lord's Supper. 10:20-21
 - Believers were observing the Lord's Supper while publicly disgracing the poor families in the church. 11:22
 - Believers were observing the Lord's Supper while showing no temperance and being gluttonous and even getting drunk in the public assembly. 11:21
 - Believers were observing the Lord's Supper while publicly holding grudges against one another and separating into divisions and groups. 11:18
4. They were sinning against one another and in so doing they were sinning against Christ's body because believers **are** the body of Christ. 8:12
 - How do you serve Christ? You can't actually serve Christ Himself. He is in heaven at the right hand of the Father. You serve Christ by serving others.
 - How do you become guilty of sinning against Christ? You can't actually sin against Christ physically. He is in heaven at the right hand of the Father. You sin against Christ when you sin against other people in the body of Christ. 8:12

5. Again, religion makes verse 27 very mystical and spooky. If you don't observe the Lord's Supper worthily (for religion - this means the way they tell you), then you are in big trouble and may be zapped.
6. Let us make one thing very clear. When it comes to standing before God and being worthy, none of us will ever be worthy in ourselves. It is **Christ** that makes us worthy. It is Christ and His grace that makes us *"accepted in the beloved."*
Ephesians 1:6
 - Paul is not discussing them being worthy to take the Lord's Supper. If we have trusted Christ, we stand before God justified and worthy because we are in Christ!
7. Paul is discussing the **manner** in which they were observing the Lord's Supper.
 - "Unworthily" is an adverb describing the **way** they were observing it.
 - They were bringing public reproach to Christ because of the manner in which they were observing this blessed remembrance of Christ's death.
 - Paul is saying, "You are celebrating the giving of His body for our sins, and at the same time sinning against the very ones who compose His body today."
8. **1 Corinthians 8:12** and **12:25-27** shed light on the meaning of verse 27. There is nothing spooky or mystical in this verse.
9. He is simply showing that the envy, pride, and arrogance that led people to take Christ's **physical** body and sin against and mutilate it, is the same as when you are spiritually guilty of sinning against Christ by treating your brethren (the body of Christ) in a prideful, envious, and arrogant way.
10. Paul is dealing with their conduct in the public assembly. This is the context.