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for some more work on the Head Covering study.*

Study 15: 1st Corinthians Chapter 11

The Lord's Supper

Introduction

In the latter part of chapter 11 Paul deals with the proper practice of the Lord's Supper. Paul's teachings here are so familiar, that we are in danger of missing the context of what he has to say. It's like looking at the trees, but missing the forest.

Body of the Study

The introduction to the issue

The Passover background to the Lord's Supper

The Lord's institution of the Supper

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Instructions for proper observance of the Supper

What does an unworthy manner mean?

The proper attitude towards the Lord's Supper

Homework and preparation for next week:

- *What examples of insensitivity, discourtesy, or economic distinction do we find in the church today? How can we recognise them and correct them?*
- *When we partake of the Lord's Supper, we have unleavened bread (bread without the yeast that makes bread rise and fluffy), and non-alcoholic wine. See if you can find a scriptural basis for this practice.*
- Read the notes as a review of the study.
- Read chapters 12, 13, and 14 together in one sitting in preparation for next week.

Notes for study 15: Chapter 11:17 - 34

Introduction

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Body of the Study

The introduction to the issue

Paul regarded the Lord's Supper issue as a "serious" one. This was something that he could not and would not praise them about. The way in which they were coming together to observe the supper called for condemnation not commendation.

The manner in which they were coming together was divisive. Paul spent a lot of time in the early chapters dealing with the issue of division and factions amongst the Corinthian church. In 1:4:6 Paul says that he has used the examples of division as *figuratively applying to the apostles*. We noted in our study at that point (study 5) that they were "...*puffed up...one against the other...*" and perhaps the division was over the possession of the spiritual gifts.

The factionalism was so established, and the lines drawn so strongly, that the cliques that were established in the church were inhibiting the sharing of the Lord's Supper together in a proper manner. Instead of coming together to partake of the supper, they were coming together to share a common meal. But, in doing that those who were well endowed had more than sufficient (gluttony might be an appropriate description), and those who were poor and had nothing had to go without. The factionalism prohibited appropriate sharing of what they had.

Paul tells them to eat at home, so that when they come together they might focus on their prime purpose – the Lord's Supper.

This of course, raises the question as to whether the New Testament church engaged in the practice of eating a meal together, and if so, was such considered as a part of the worship program? There are several passages in the New Testament that may suggest such (Acts 2:42-46; Acts 20:7-11; 2 Pet 2:13; Jude 12). Clearly the Corinthian church was engaging in such a practice. Whilst the other three passages might appear to suggest participation in a common meal, a closer examination of them will not support the conclusion.

The matter is solved by Paul's instruction here to the Corinthians "...*you...have houses to eat and drink in ... if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home...*" (1:11:22; 34)

The Passover background to the Lord's Supper

The Passover was instituted to remember Israel's release from bondage in Egypt, and how God passed through the land and struck down the eldest male child in each house. But where the blood was seen on the lintel and side posts of the door, God passed over the house and did not inflict the punishment. [In exactly the same manner, God will pass over our sins when He sees the blood of His Son sprinkled on our hearts, and He will not inflict the punishment that is due to us].

At the celebration of the Passover – the Seder meal – there were several elements that were on the table. These included the roast lamb, the unleavened bread, the unfermented wine, vegetables with lettuce, bitter herbs, and crushed nuts and fruit mixed with vinegar were used to dip the lettuce. The Passover was celebrated on the 14th day of the first month – sometimes called Nisan and commonly called Abib.

The Lord's institution of the Supper

On the night that Jesus was betrayed, Jesus had come together with His disciples and they ate the Passover meal together. After finishing the meal, Jesus took *two* of the Passover meal elements that were on the table, and carried them over into the New Covenant in the Lord's Supper. Not everything was carried over, and hence not everything is authorised in our worship. We don't have roast lamb when we have the Lord's Supper because the Lord did not carry it over.

The Supper was instituted following the completion of the Passover meal (1:11:25). Jesus took the unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine. He said to the disciples that this was to represent His body and His blood. This must have been very perplexing for the disciples, who were still apprehensive as to why Jesus should need to suffer at all, let alone die, and especially die now! During the events of the following 24 hours, the disciples show their lack of comprehension time and time again (for example during the discussion after the supper, whilst they were asleep in the garden, by Peter's reaction with the sword, by Peter's denial, and the others fleeing during Jesus' trials).

A new significance is brought to the Passover. The Seder meal reminded Israel of their hardship in Egypt, and their escape from death and bondage. As Christians, the Lord's Supper reminds us of our struggle with sin, and our escape from the death and bondage that sin brings upon us.

Jesus said this was to be done in remembrance of Him. Priest¹ observes:

“... “Remember” is a verb; “remembrance” is a noun. Jesus did not say, “Eat bread while remembering me.” He said “*Do this in remembrance of me.*” ... (An analogy may illustrate this. One may say, “Marrying is an exciting experience.” “Marriage,” though, may have its dull moments. “Marrying” is performing an act, while “marriage” is a state of being.) ... It is possible that Jesus meant, ... for them to keep the entire supper, including assembling, prayer of thanksgiving, breaking, passing, and eating the bread – all in a state of remembrance. This state of remembrance would certainly not be some kind of fleeting thought or momentary vague impression or feeling aroused at the single moment of ingesting the bread...”

The abuse of the Supper at Corinth

If the assembly at Corinth was held in the home of one of the members (which is highly likely, as more formal buildings or assembly places came along much later, although there are some notable exceptions (Acts 2:46)), then the layout of the house may well have contributed to the problems. Houses at the time had a central atrium, and the dining area would have been adjacent to it. The “notable” class would have clustered into the dining area where they could recline and take up the comfortable seating positions whilst affording themselves of the food that was placed there. The “lower” class would be excluded, and made to feel not welcome in that area, and so would be precluded from partaking of the food.

The “have's” were not waiting for the “have not's” to arrive, nor sharing their food with them. They are only concerned about “...*his own supper...*” rather than coming together in remembrance of the Lord. This stands in plain contrast to the fellowship and sharing of the church at the beginning in Jerusalem (Acts 2:46; 4:32-34).

Paul rightly describes their action as “...*your gathering in the assemble is not to eat the Lord's Supper...*” (1:11:20).

We have here another example of the culture of the world having invaded the church in Corinth. The assembly was characterised by worldly rather than Godly actions. Some were left hungry, whilst others overindulged.

¹ Priest, James E. “The Lord's Supper – Then and Now” Harding University 67th Annual Lectureship, 1990 p. 475
Study of Corinthians by Graeme Offer

Instructions for proper observance of the Supper

The time of writing First Corinthians is around 57 AD pre-dates the writing of the gospels, with the synoptic gospels generally attributed to a time early to mid 60's, and John's gospel much later. So, we have here (in all probability) the first instructive writing concerning the Lord's Supper, which was written around 25 years after its institution.

Paul's knowledge of the Lord's Supper, unlike the other apostles, did not come from his being there. But Paul adds that his knowledge came from *the Lord*. We would have to conclude that He revealed it to Paul whilst he was in Arabia shortly after his conversion (Gal 1:17-18). His knowledge of the Lord's Supper had been "...delivered to (*the Corinthians*)..." by Paul, which must have been during his initial visit when the church commenced (Acts 18).

Paul deals with the *mechanics* of the celebration of the Supper, which is so familiar to us, that it needs no explanation here – the bread, and the "cup". It should be pointed out that "the cup" is the contents, not the vessel. If Jesus meant the vessel when He said "the cup" then there would be a lot of people walking around with funny necks, since we are all to drink it!

The Lord's Supper is a proclamation which Priest says "...is an attestation of the Lord's sacrificial death, memorialized in the emblems, until he, as the one who lives eternally, makes his return ... The proclamation is continuous; the observance is periodic. However, the dynamic faith of the participants, intensified in a "state of remembrance," sees the partaking in an eschatological context [*which means it relates to the second coming - GO*]. The death of Christ is not the end. It is the beginning of the "end of days" (Daniel 12:13)..."²

What does an unworthy manner mean?

We might immediately think that we should refrain from partaking of the supper because our sin makes us unworthy. Whilst that is true, we need to remember that we have been cleansed and made right (justified) by the blood of Jesus. It is exactly this sacrifice that we have come to remember.

However, this is not the context that Paul has in mind when he writes to the Corinthians. They had turned the Lord's supper into something that Jesus (or Paul) had not authorised. They showed not only a lack of respect for the Supper, but also the same lack of respect for their brothers and sisters. So, Paul tells them that to eat and drink the elements of the supper (I hesitate to use the description *partake of the supper*, as it implies that what they would be doing was in remembrance of the Lord) in such a manner was sacrosanct to putting the Lord to death.

They were told to *examine themselves* and so to eat of the bread and drink of the cup. In being in the state of remembrance, we are to not only recognise and remember our relationship with the Lord, but also our relationship with our brethren. Clearly the Corinthians were abusing both. How could we be in communion and fellowship with God – who justified us when we were charity cases – when we behave in such a manner to our brethren? We were all charity cases together, and it is only through Christ's sacrifice that we have been made worthy. And all of our brethren are in the same boat together! If we eat and drink in such a manner, we "...do not discern the Lord's body..." (...recognising the body of the Lord...NIV). We recognise the significance of Christ's sacrifice, and importantly His life through the resurrection. We recognise that the things that He suffered were because of our sins, and we recognise the nature and extent of His sufferings. In Ephesians 1:22-23, Paul adds another dimension to the significance of the Lord's body, when he describes the church as the body of Christ. By abusing the Lord's Supper we have not understood the nature of the church. The Corinthians had misunderstood it. We need to ensure that we don't misapply it!

² Preist, Ibid, p. 477

The Corinthians were (physically) suffering as a result of their gluttonous behaviour. Many were weak and sick, and many slept (probably through the assembly resulting from overeating). Paul most likely has physical consequences in mind here rather than *sleep* as a metaphor for *death*.

The proper attitude towards the Lord's Supper

Paul reminds them of the Lord's teaching on judgement –the judgement that we give to others is the same that judges us (Mt 7:1-2). But by judging ourselves, we will see ourselves in our true light – we look inwardly – then we will escape the judgement and discipline that God would otherwise need to bring on us.

Paul closes with the important statement that we need to “...*wait for one another...*” We need to look out for our brothers and sisters in Christ, and share the Supper together with them. The Corinthians had turned it into a totally selfish activity, where some of the individuals regarded themselves as the only important people.

In closing, Paul ties together his instruction from the beginning. If they put the proper observance into practice, then they will be edified rather than need to be disciplined.