

# Instructions Regarding the Lord's Supper I Corinthians 11:17-26

preached @ Hawkwood Baptist Church  
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March 11, 2017

I Corinthians 11:17 Now in giving the following instruction I do not praise you, since you come together not for the better but for the worse. 18 For to begin with, I hear that when you come together as a church there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. 19 There must, indeed, be factions among you, so that those who are approved may be recognized among you. 20 Therefore, when you come together, it is not really to eat the Lord's Supper. 21 For at the meal, each one eats his own supper ahead of others. So one person is hungry while another gets drunk! 22 Don't you have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you look down on the church of God and embarrass those who have nothing? What should I say to you? Should I praise you? I do not praise you for this!

23 For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: On the night when He was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took bread, 24 gave thanks, broke it, and said, "This is My body, which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me."

25 In the same way, after supper He also took the cup and said, "This cup is the new covenant established by My blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." 26 For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes.

## Intro.

Today we are picking up in I Corinthians where we left off at the end of last November. And to me, it is no accident that God has providentially arranged it so that we will be studying the Lord's Supper on a Sunday when we are scheduled to eat that meal together. As I have studied this passage in preparation for today I've come to feel that this is an especially holy place in the Word of God, and when we're done I hope you believe that too.

But first, let me draw your attention to two statements by Paul that must have shocked the Corinthians when this letter was first read. Look at verse 17 where Paul says, "In giving the following instruction I do *not* praise you." And continuing with that thought he says, "The reason I do not praise you is that you are coming together, not for the better but for the worse." And then, as if his language hasn't been strong enough, in verse 20 he says, "When you come together it is *not* really to eat the Lord's Supper."

Finally, after once again criticizing the Corinthian Christians for their factionalism, as well as the habit of some to be feasting and getting drunk while poorer Christians stood by hungry, Paul makes it clear that he has just about had it with these people. "Don't you have houses to eat and drink in?" he asks. "You are despising God's church and humiliating those who are too poor to bring any food. Should I praise you for this?"

Now in case you haven't been paying attention, understand that this was a rhetorical question, the kind that demanded a loud, "No, Paul! We have behaved despicably and we agree that you should *not* praise us." But Paul knew too many Corinthians wouldn't get it unless he spelled it out. So he did. "No," he says, "I do *not* praise you for the way you've been behaving.

Please understand that I do not emphasize Paul's ire because I think God is angry with HBC. Not at all. But I wanted you to see it because it tells us just how important the Lord's Supper was to Paul and, more importantly, how important the supper is to God. Even-tempered people don't get angry over little things. They let them pass. But Paul was angry because he knew that the Lord's Supper matters to God—that holds a central place in Christian worship.

He drives this point home in verse 23. "What I know about the Lord's Supper," he says, "I received as direct revelation from the Lord!" Think about what that means in the context of I Corinthians. If you look back at chapter 7 you will see that on even so important a matter as marriage and divorce, Paul was left to give his best advice "as one who by the Lord's mercy is trustworthy" (I Cor. 7:25). But not so with the Lord's Supper. Here he claims direct revelation. He's not just guessing about it. In some manner undescribed, Paul claims that Jesus told him exactly how the supper is supposed to be served.

What's more, Paul had already passed this information on to the church at Corinth but they were acting like they'd never heard anything about it before. God help us to be as much unlike the Corinthian Christians as possible when it comes our time to enjoy this sacred meal a few moments from now.

#### 1. **Brief word on modern abuses of the Lord's Supper.**

- a. Along with baptism, the Lord's Supper must not be hyper-spiritualized. There are denominations and churches that teach that because all of the Christian life is supposed to be sacramental (devoted to God and lived for God) then no ceremony or ritual can add anything to it. Such teaching ignores the fact that in creation man was made both physical and spiritual, and the two are never to be separated. What we do with our bodies is inevitably a concrete expression of what is in our souls, and there is no better way to eat and drink to the glory of God (I Cor. 10:31) than through participation in the Lord's Supper.
- b. Nor should the Supper be hyper-materialized.
  - i. The Bible does not teach transubstantiation, the Roman Catholic doctrine in which the elements become the actual body and blood of Christ while maintaining the appearance of bread and wine.
  - ii. The Bible does not teach "the real presence" either, if by that you mean Jesus's actual presence is somehow tied to the bread and the cup. Actually, Paul teaches the Supper is a memorial meal *because* Jesus is no longer present with us.
  - iii. We celebrate to remember Jesus in His physical absence, not His presence. When we partake of the supper we *remember* that He is no longer with us in the flesh, and we *remember* that He is coming again. If He were actually with us, we wouldn't have to remember Him, now would we.

- iv. What the Bible actually teaches is a combination of symbol and reality. When Jesus on the night He was betrayed broke the bread and served the cup He was standing right in front of the disciples. There is no rational way to reach the conclusion that when Jesus passed out these elements Peter was thinking, “I’m actually eating His body and drinking His blood.” The disciples had long ago gotten used to Jesus speaking in symbol and metaphor.

### **Examples of Jesus speaking metaphorically**

Mat. 16:6 “Watch out and beware of the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.”

John 2:19 “Destroy this sanctuary, and I will raise it up in three days.” . . . But He was speaking about the sanctuary of His body.

John 3:3 “Unless someone is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

John 4:13 Jesus said, “Everyone who drinks from this water will get thirsty again. 14 But whoever drinks from the water that I will give him will never get thirsty again—ever! In fact, the water I will give him will become a well of water springing up within him for eternal life.”

- c. No, brothers and sisters, we must use real elements (actual fruit of the vine, actual bread, real water in baptism) to symbolize an equally real spiritual reality. But in the end we must realize that “The kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom. 14:17).

### **2. Covenantal significance of the Supper**

- a. Compare Exodus 24:8 with I Cor. 11:25 from today’s text.

I Cor. 11:25 In the same way, after supper He also took the cup and said, “This cup is the new covenant established by My blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

Exodus 24:8 Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, “This is the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you concerning all these words.”

- i. With such similarity in wording it is not possible that the disciples would not have seen the connection between the covenant that God established with Israel at Mt. Sinai and the New Covenant Jesus established in that upper room on the night of His betrayal.
- ii. In fact, the two covenants are directly related, and not just because Moses and Jesus used similar words in their institution.
  - (1) Both are blood covenants. In Exodus, young men sacrificed bulls and Moses capture the blood in bowls to sprinkle over the altar and the people. Jesus offered His own blood as the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.
  - (2) But the first covenant was mere shadow. The new covenant has real substance. Hebrews tells us that it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins (Heb. 10:4). “But this man, after offering one sacrifice for sins forever,

sat down at the right hand of God. . . . For by one offering He has perfected forever those who are sanctified” (Heb. 10:12-14).

- iii. Both covenants require the keeping of God’s law
  - (1) In the Old Covenant, the law was applied externally and the people were required to keep it as proof of their love and obedience toward God.
  - (2) But the better promise of the New Covenant is that we who belong to the New Covenant—who are privileged to drink from the cup as a testimony of our membership in it—are not merely circumcised in the flesh, but born again by the supernatural work of God’s Holy Spirit.
  - (3) For us the law of God is no longer external, written on tablets and imposed upon our existence from outside. Instead, the New Covenant’s better promises mean that when we are born of the Spirit God’s laws are written on our hearts. Our obedience to God’s law is now proof that our hearts have been renewed and transformed by the supernatural grace of God.
  
- b. It is not an accident that Jesus established the Lord’s Supper at the close of the Passover Meal.
  - i. The Passover celebrated God’s deliverance from Egypt. But remember, on the night when God took the life of every firstborn male child, the only reason the destroyer did not enter the Israelite homes was because they had sprinkled the blood of the Passover lamb on their doorposts. Even in the second book of the Old Testament the Bible was teaching that “all have sinned and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:32), Egyptians and Israelites alike. Only faith and obedience saved the Israelites that night.
  - ii. By historically linking Passover and the Lord’s Supper, Jesus also made clear that what was essential in the first covenant was not lost in the second. Both covenants point to Him, the only and all-sufficient sacrifice for the sins of His people. Passover pointed forward to our Lord’s blood being shed. The Lord’s Supper points back to what He has done for us.
  - iii. That is why Paul could say back in I Cor. 5:7, “For Christ our Passover has been sacrificed.” It is through faith in Him that His blood covers our sin so that we are not destroyed on the Day of Judgment.

### **Believe on the Lord Jesus**

In Revelation 7 John tells us that as he looked into heaven he saw “a vast multitude from every nation, tribe, people, and language, which no one could number, standing before the throne and before the Lamb. They were robed in white with palm branches in their hands” (Rev. 7:9). As John observed this multitude one of the 24 elders asked him if he knew who were these people dressed in white, and where they had come from. John said, “Sir, you know.” The heavenly being answered, “These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb” (Rev. 7:13-14).

Oh dear friends. You don’t have to wait for the great tribulation to wash your robes and make them white in the blood of the lamb. You can believe and be saved today. You can be covered by the blood of Christ today.