

The Bread & the Cup were instituted by Jesus on the night He was betrayed as a symbolic remembrance of Him and of His death. Jesus took bread to symbolize His body. He gave thanks and broke it, telling His disciples to take and eat it. He also took the cup with wine to symbolize His blood, saying that it represented the new covenant in His blood. But Paul's purpose in writing about the Bread and Cup in this passage was not to explain how it was instituted, nor to explain its meaning, but to use it to reveal the sinfulness of the Corinthians in how they were treating one another.

- I. The manner in which the church was gathering was blameworthy, not praiseworthy (11:17-22). Their gatherings were a reproach on what the Bread & Cup symbolized.
  1. A picture of "typical" church gatherings in NT times is different from the picture which the average person in Europe would have. They generally met in homes, probably on Sunday evenings, and often with a common meal. There was a broad social mix: Jew and Gentile, slave and free.
  2. There was a spiritual nature to the communal meals. Jude called them "love feasts," perhaps because of the love demonstrated at the meals or because of the command at the Last Supper to love one another (John 13:34). Paul called it the "Lord's" supper (a term for a full meal), either because it included celebration of the Bread & Cup, or because it should have been characterized by the character of the Lord.
  3. The situation in Corinth was different than it should have been and Paul could not praise them for this. The first to arrive, probably the non-working rich, brought their food but were not waiting for the slave and the poor free man would have worked till sundown. They went ahead and ate, indulging themselves while others watched hungrily. In this they despised the church of God and humiliated the poor.

"For" makes the logical connection to the Bread & Cup, which is followed in verse 27 with "therefore." (See the earlier message on this passage for an explanation of the Bread and Cup.)

- II. The Bread and Cup and their practice of it at their communal meals revealed the reproach in their manner of gathering (11:23-26). Certain conclusions were expected from Paul's application of the Bread & Cup here.
  1. The cost of salvation seen in the death of Christ needed to be valued and lived out.
  2. The symbolism of the Bread & Cup pointed to certain aspects of union and equality which exists among believers at the cost of Christ's death. We share one life. We are one Body. (Cf. 1 Cor 10:14-17.) We are equally sinful, equally blessed, equally enabled to live as we should, since each believer is beneficiary of the New Covenant.

Consider though the impact of the Corinthian gatherings. Some were sitting and feasting while others were watching in hunger. The celebration of the Bread and Cup came and a few crumbs were passed to the hungry with the pious words, this is to remember the body of Christ and His death. They were not remembering the death of Christ in their actions and that small crumb made His death appear insignificant compared to their feasting!

- III. Such reproachful actions had consequences (11:27-34).

(Eating in "an unworthy manner" (v 27) does not refer to whether the person is worthy or not, but to the manner of eating as explained in the context. It is taking the Bread and Cup without consideration for others for whom Christ died.)

1. There is the consequence that one becomes "guilty of body and blood of the Lord". This probably means assumption of responsibility for the death of Christ. (Cf. Acts 7:52; Hebr. 6:6; 10:29.) When we treat each other in a manner not fitting to who we are, that is, members of Christ, then we are doing it to Christ, as if we are once again participating in His crucifixion.
2. There is the consequence that anyone who eats and drinks without distinguishing that believers for the Body of Christ, calls down judgment upon himself (v 29). The Corinthians experienced it with sickness and death, the discipline of a loving Father.
3. A final consequence was the need to change.
  - a. Change involves first of all self-examination. Do we mean what we say when we partake?
  - b. Change furthermore required of the Corinthians a different, correct perception. They needed to discern that they were the Body of Christ. ("Judge" in vs 31 is the same word as in v 29, i.e., recognize the Body.) In self-examination my faults become clearer when I recognize who we really are.
  - c. Change finally requires differing actions. The Corinthians were to wait for those who had little and were to share in true love. They shouldn't gather simply to relieve hunger, but do that at home.

When we take communion together, we unfortunately tend to separate it from the rest of what we do. But God wants us to act all the time, like we say we believe when we "proclaim" the Lord's death in eating the bread and drinking the cup.

We may not eat to the exclusion of others but other areas of our lives may show if we are really recognizing fellow believers as the Body of Christ. For example, how do we talk about and to fellow believers? Do we talk about one another in a way that fits what we proclaim when we eat the bread and drink the cup?

We claim that Jesus died on our behalf, because we are sinners. We claim that God has written His law on our hearts so that we now can live like we should and even want to. We claim that He has made us one. If this is what we claim, then let us live this way too.