

The Bread & Cup: Participation in a worthy manner (1 Corinthians 10:16–17; 11:27–32)

Participation in the bread and cup is a meaningful practice instituted by the Lord Jesus to remember His death. The elements, bread and wine (or juice), remind us of His body and blood, which in turn reminds us of the forgiveness which His sacrifice provided and the covenant which His blood sealed. The meaning is so significant, that participation must be in a worthy manner or else incur God's judgment. Therefore, both the sense of participation and the sense of a worthy or unworthy manner need to be understood.

1. *Participation in the blood and body of Christ (10:16–17).*

- a. The Corinthians had turned to the living God from idols, learning that idols have “no real existence” (8:4; cf. Psalm 115:4–7; Isaiah 44:13–19), and that the meat offered to idols is and remains just meat (8:8; 10:25, 27). But such knowledge inflated their sense of freedom and strength, and in their arrogance they thought they could participate in pagan, idolatrous feasts (8:1, 10; cf. 10:12). Therefore, Paul exhorted them to flee idolatry (10:7, 14) and stop eating at the pagan, idolatrous feasts.
- b. Paul supports his charge to flee idolatry with the illustration of the bread and cup (which we seek to understand) and with the sacrifices of Israel (10:18). The priests and at times the worshiper received portions of the sacrifice to eat, but with clear regulations (Leviticus 7:11–36). Ritual cleanness was such an important prerequisite, that failure meant being cut off from the people. Such regulations showed that the eating was part of the sacrificial worship, which is represented by the altar. To eat of the sacrifice aligned the worshiper with the belief system of the sacrifice.
- c. The pagan, idolatrous feasts of Corinth also associated the participant with the idolatrous system.
 - Behind the idolatry were demonic forces (10:20a), so that the pagan feast was “the table of demons” (10:21) and those eating were “participants with demons” (10:20b). Feasting honored the demons and glorified the false worship. Those feasting shared in demonic work.
 - Eating the sacrificial meat outside the context of the feasts was a different situation (10:23–33). The meat was only meat and could be eaten. But if someone revealed that the meat had been offered in sacrifice, then the believer was not to eat for the sake of the other person and that person's conscience (10:28–29). The act of eating communicated support of the idolatrous system.
 - Therefore, the Christian was free to eat the meat in certain circumstances, but should not participate in the temple feasts, and should refrain from consciously eating sacrificial meat when others observed that. Idolatry and true worship of God are mutually exclusive (therefore flee) (10:21–22).
- d. Parallels are made with the Bread and Cup, which inform us of the nature of celebrating the Bread and Cup. There is a spiritual reality, the once-for-all death of Christ for sin, represented in the Bread and Cup. Participation is an affirmation by consent of the truths represented, such as believers being joined into one body (10:17). A person cannot accurately make conflicting claims by participating in both pagan feasts and the Lord's table, but will only arouse the Lord's jealousy.

When you take the bread and the cup, you are saying by your actions, that Christ's body was given for your sin. You are saying that you are joined to Him. And in so saying, you are saying that you are joined to every other believer. You are saying that Christ shed His blood to make possible the new covenant for you. And you are affirming your acceptance of the conditions of that covenant.

2. *Participation in a worthy manner (11:27–32)*

- a. The Corinthian believers were gathering in a manner which Paul could not commend (11:17–22). At their common meals (cf. Jude 12, “love feasts”) the rich were feasting and drinking but letting poorer brothers and sisters go hungry. Sharing together the Bread and Cup condemned such a gathering, since such gatherings ignored the cost of their salvation and the equal union of brothers and sisters in Christ.
- b. The rich, by mistreating others in the Body of Christ, were taking the bread and cup in an unworthy manner. (Paul is addressing the manner in which the bread and cup are taken, not the character of the person taking it.) Taking the Bread and Cup improperly had consequences:
 - Taking the Bread & Cup improperly makes one “guilty of the body and the blood of the Lord”, that is, they were treating Jesus like those who had crucified Him. If you treat other believers in a manner not fitting to whom they are, that is, members of Christ, then we are doing it to Christ.
 - Taking the Bread & Cup improperly, that is eating and drinking without recognizing the body of the Lord, is eating and drinking judgment on oneself. You need to distinguish what is the body of Christ, that all true believers compose the Church which is the body, and then act that way. You only truly value the forgiveness in Christ, when you willingly forgive others. God was disciplining the Corinthians with sickness and even death, because they failed to live what they confessed.
 - Taking the Bread & Cup improperly should stop and changes should be made: self-examination, are you living what you claim; a corrected perspective, are you seeing yourself for what you truly are; and higher respect for others, don't gather to satisfy your own hunger but think of others first.

Do not take lightly what you claim by your actions, when you take the Bread and Cup. Prepare yourselves and, men, lead your families in preparation to assure proper understanding, truthful participation, and participation in a worthy manner.

Questions for further thought and/or discussion:

- When are you tempted to think lightly of the Bread and Cup? Why? When are you tempted to think sacramentally of the Bread and Cup? How can you guard against wrong extremes?
- If you are married, how should the practice of the Bread and Cup affect your married life?
- If you are single and live alone, how might you deceive yourself in thinking that you are treating other believers correctly, when you are not?
- Why is avoiding participation in the Bread and Cup not a solution to avoid God's judgment on taking it in an unworthy manner?