

I CORINTHIANS: HANDLING BELIEVERS' PRACTICAL PROBLEMS

XV. Guidance On Observing The Lord's Table

(1 Corinthians 11:17-34)

I. Introduction

- A. The people Paul disciplined in Corinth lived in a city that was known for its immorality, alcoholism and worldly pursuits (Ryrie Study Bible, KJV, 1978, "Introduction to the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians: The City of Corinth," p. 1619), so the formidable influence of the city's culture on the Corinthian believers left Paul addressing "(a)berrant beliefs and practices of an astonishing variety" in his letters to them, *Ibid.*
- B. However, in a vision Paul received from God as he ministered at Corinth in Acts 18:10b NIV, God told him, "I have many people in this city," so Paul was to keep on ministering regardless of the trials he faced there.
- C. In 1 Corinthians 11:17-34, Paul gave guidance on observing the Lord's Table to correct errant practices and to give edifying direction on the subject. We view this passage for our insight, application, and edification:

II. Guidance On Observing The Lord's Table, 1 Corinthians 11:17-34.

- A. To understand Paul's instruction, we view the history of observing the Lord's Table in the Corinthian Church:
 - 1. Christ instituted the Lord's Table at His last Passover meal with the disciples, Matthew 26:17-30. The institution of the Lord's Table thus occurred after the Passover meal had commenced and after Judas had left in the midst of the meal to betray Jesus to the religious rulers. (Bible Know. Com., N. T., p. 83, 177)
 - 2. "By the time Paul wrote" 1 Corinthians, "the Lord's Supper was celebrated in two stages" composed first of the **Agape**, the "love feast" (Jude 12; Pliny *Letters* 10. 96. 7) and then of "the partaking of the bread and cup at the end of a communal meal," what was later called "the 'Eucharist' (*Didache* 9:1; Ignatius *Letter to the Philadelphians* 4) from the Greek word for 'thanksgiving' (*eucharisteo*)," *Ibid.*, p. 530.
 - 3. However, "(a)pparently some of the wealthier members" at the Corinthian Church's love feast "were not sharing their food but greedily consumed it before the poor showed up (v. 21)," *Ibid.*
- B. Paul thus gave corrective guidance in regard to the love feast and the Lord's Table in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34:
 - 1. The apostle wrote that the presence of divisions in the body was not good, though divisions were needed that those who were approved might become evident to the immature believers present, 1 Cor. 11:17-19.
 - 2. Specifically, Paul critiqued the abuse of the love feast where apparently some wealthier members were indulging their appetites and those who were poorer and arrived later missed eating anything, what created divisions in the body, 1 Cor. 11:20-21. Paul taught that if people were hungry, they should eat at home before coming to the love feast that there be unity when everyone present could partake, 1 Cor. 11:22.
 - 3. To illustrate this instruction, Paul gave Christ's teaching on the Lord's Table (that came after the love feast) to show Christ's selfless sacrifice for believers opposite the Corinthians' love feast abuse, v. 23-26:
 - a. The same night when Christ was being betrayed by Judas, Jesus gave thanks, broke the bread, giving it to His disciples with the explanation that it represented His body that was broken for them, that they were to observe this practice of eating this bread in remembrance of Him and His sacrifice for them, v. 23-24.
 - b. Paul then explained that Jesus took the cup and claimed that it represented the new covenant in His blood, that His disciples were to drink of it in remembrance of His great sacrifice for their salvation, v. 25.
 - c. The Lord's Table thus became a testimony of Christ's selfless life, death and second coming for us, v. 26.
 - 4. Paul thus declared that if the Corinthians partook of the Lord's Table following their selfish indulgence in the love feast, they were partaking of the Lord's Table unworthily in danger of divine discipline, v. 27-30.
 - 5. The believers were thus to judge themselves to avoid divine discipline (v. 31-32) and so to wait for all the believers to show up at the love feast before eating to avoid harboring sin at the Lord's Table, v. 33-34.

Lesson: *Since the Lord's Table causes us to recall Christ's selfless sacrifice for us, we are obligated before God to be selflessly considerate of other believers, not harboring sin in our lives in observing the ordinance.*

Application: *(1) May we observe the Lord's Table with selfless love. (2) Today, we widen the application of the call in 1 Corinthians 11:28 to self-examination to confess any sin, not just selfish divisiveness, for harboring any sin offends God, Psalm 66:18. (4) At our Church, we practice "Open Communion" where any believer may partake, for we hold that discipline for sin in connection with the Lord's Table is conducted only by God, not by church leaders, and one is to examine himself before partaking, 1 Corinthians 11:28-32. (5) The "Closed Communion" view (local church members only can partake) and "Close Communion" view (members of any Biblical church in good standing can partake) involve rulings by church leaders that we hold contradicts 1 Corinthians 11:28-32.*