

# THE DIVISIVE USE OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

## NOTES ON I CORINTHIANS 11:17-34

### *No. 2 in a Series of 3 Articles on The Supper*

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## FOREWORD

Sometimes it is difficult to approach a subject that many people feel is most sacred to their religious devotions. In this case, the subject of the Lord's Supper is, to some, the absolute apex of "holy-ground." I have had individuals say that they would not even consider discussing such a sacred event with anyone who would question their position and practice. To them, it was a closed matter, and any discussion which might challenge their thoughts was considered as verging on blasphemy.

Needless to say, the Apostle Paul did not hold this opinion. When the Corinthian church violated the physical and spiritual principles inherent in this meal he openly and sharply corrected their conduct and his epistle was published for all to read down through the ages. No doubt, Paul's inspired rebukes and corrections were also designed by the Spirit of God to prevent such idolatry as has developed around the ritual eating of two physical and earthly elements—bread and wine (a piece of cracker and sip of grape juice to most). Therefore, it is imperative that we also read and study Paul's words that we might "examine ourselves, whether we be in the faith..." (II Cor. 13:5) on this subject.

## INTRODUCTION

In I Cor. 11:17-34 the Apostle Paul deals with the problem in the Corinthian assembly centered on the **divisive** use of the "Lord's Supper." When the Corinthians had assembled to eat a common dinner together some had observed the "Lord's Supper" in a divisive manner along with drunkenness and gluttony. The result was general disorder of such a proportion as to cause the physical disciplinary judgment of God upon them—meaning sickness and even death.

No matter what the denominational persuasion is of most commentators on this passage, they all seem to have two things in common: first, they believe the Corinthian assembly had somehow **mingled** into their common meal (or love feast) the Lord's Supper; secondly, most all commentators think Paul intended there to be a **separation** between those common meals and the Lord's Supper. Later in time, Christendom sacramentalized what they called "The Lord's Supper" and virtually did away with any regular fellowship meals.

Certain Independent churches and many Plymouth Brethren groups, in an effort to line themselves more closely with the exact terms of this passage, will actually have a "pot-luck" or "covered dish" dinner, followed by the observance of their "Lord's Supper" in solemn ceremony. A few groups will also be careful to only observe this routine in their Saturday evening (or Sunday evening) services and never on a Sunday morning. We shall see that none of these accommodations will satisfy the demand of what the Scriptures actually reveal as the solution to the problem that the Apostle Paul ordered.

It is the purpose of this study to show that an unbiased investigation will prove that Paul, indeed, ordered a **separation** of the "Lord's Supper," but this separation was from its observance in the midst of a general collective gathering of the whole church. In other words, when the whole church assembled together they were "**not to be eating** the Lord's Supper" (verse 20).

Whatever the Corinthians were doing, it should be obvious to every reader of the text, they were not trying to observe a modern day "Holy Communion!" There is no remote similarity between the "Mass" of Roman Catholicism and this meal at Corinth. Nor is there even a slight similarity between the typical Protestant "Lord's Supper" celebration and this evening feast or "supper" in the Corinthian church.

One of the most difficult things to do in a Bible study of this kind is to prevent the traditional practices of modern churches from clouding the minds of those who would approach the Scriptures. It is natural in man to project upon the Word of God his religious ideas rather than allowing the Scriptures to unfold to us the mind of the inspired writer. Sad to say, the confusion that reigned in Corinth still reigns in traditional Christendom today. Who is to say that the gluttony and drunkenness of the carnal Corinthians is worse than the traditional gluttony for babylonish idolatry and the religious intoxication of today's Christendom? And, who cannot fail to observe that the division and disorder which reigned in Corinth has been multiplied a thousand times by the divisions and disorder of modern sectarian Church-anity?

Often statements are made in Bible texts, like the one we are studying, that presume the knowledge and understanding of those being directly addressed. Whereas, we who read these words are standing off nearly two thousand years in time and we do not immediately comprehend what is being specifically meant. The remedy for this problem is actually found within the body of Scriptural revelation itself. A thorough searching of related passages and background material from other biblical events will supply us with the needed information in order to make an accurate and spiritual assessment of the meaning of difficult passages. Truly, the Word of God was designed "that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (II Tim. 3:17, NKJV).

## I. Who is Addressed??

The first question before us is to identify to whom Paul is speaking in I Cor. 11:17-34. This may seem to be a redundant question to some. However, we need to remember that many of the early Christian communities were composed of two distinct groups of people. First, there were the Jewish converts who were still faithfully observing the Law of Moses (Acts 21:20). Then, there was an ever increasing number of Gentile converts who were not observing that Law (Acts 15:5-21 & 21:25). This is a fundamental fact that will help us to better appreciate the application of certain truths revealed in this context. Thus, we ask the question—Is Paul addressing the Jewish members of the congregation, the Gentile believers or is he addressing the church as a whole?

No doubt, there are some things in Paul's letters that were intended to have a special bearing on only one segment of the congregation. As an example, we can look as near as the very next chapter to see that Paul emphasizes the truths regarding the miraculous gifts toward the Gentile brethren in the Corinthian assembly. Paul says, "Ye know that ye were **Gentiles** carried away unto these dumb idols" (I Cor. 12:2). Their background in idolatry meant that they often

attributed miraculous value to the idols. Now they would learn that the influence of the Holy Spirit was the only genuine cause for supernatural manifestation in the Church of Jesus Christ. Likewise, the Jewish members of the congregation would sometimes understand things that would more closely relate to their background. Such is the case beginning in I Cor. 10:1 where Paul says, "all **our fathers** were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea..." This was most certainly true of the fathers of the Jewish members of the congregation.

These facts are important to remember. However, they do not specifically answer our original question. That can only be done by looking directly at the text and context to ascertain the exact audience Paul has in view.

In the beginning of chapter 11 Paul's "praise" (v. 2) is to the whole congregation. "Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the traditions as I delivered them to you." Paul concludes that section with the words "...we have no other custom, neither the churches of God" (v. 16). This makes it evident that Paul is addressing the whole church in general. Every other congregation is practicing these same customs as well.

The next portion or subject matter that the Apostle takes up in this chapter is what we are concerned with and it is addressed to the same people, for verse 17 says, "Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not..." In other words, Paul's expressions in the first section began with a note of gratitude to the whole congregation, whereas this section begins with a note of rebuke to the same congregation.

Notice, please, that the remaining language of Paul throughout this section obviously indicates that the whole congregation is in view and not just a segment of it. An exclusive Jewish or Gentile gathering of brethren would simply not fit the following terminology—

v:17 "you come together..."

v:18 "when you come together in the church..."

v:20 "when you come together into one place..."

v:22 "...despise you the Church of God?"

v:33 "when you come together..."

This could hardly be interpreted as only referring to a certain segment of the congregation because that segment would not constitute "the church of God," nor would it constitute "together in the church." These are designations which from the beginning of this letter referred to the whole church—see **I Cor. 1:2, 10:32 and 14:23**. It is also understood that this problem was causing division in the whole assembly and not just among, say, the Jewish members of the assembly.

The conclusion that the whole local church is in view should not, however, distract us from remembering that certain truths can have special bearing or significance to either the Jewish segment or the Gentile segment of the congregation.

By way of another illustration, a certain letter was sent out by the Apostles and elders from Jerusalem to be read in all the assemblies. You can read about it in Acts 15:19-31. No doubt, this particular letter contained some of the "traditions" Paul had in view in verse 2 of this chapter. Though this letter was delivered to and publicly read in many of the assemblies for the benefit of all, yet it had a specific bearing upon the Gentiles. It told the Gentile converts that

they were not obligated to observe any of the Mosaic Laws. It also requested the Gentile believers to give some accommodation to their Jewish brethren by not doing certain offensive things. Likewise, the Jewish members of the congregations who heard this letter read publicly would be indirectly warned not to impose any of their distinctly Jewish customs (including dietary laws or Feast days) upon the Gentile brethren.

I believe we will see that some of these principles have a direct bearing upon the interpretation of this passage of Scripture that is before us. Some of the first converts at Corinth were Jews and then a large contingency of Gentiles was saved as well (Acts 18:4-10). As we stated before, the Jewish believers were still faithfully observing the Law of Moses, whereas the Gentiles were not. During this time of transition out of Judaism into pure Christianity (approximately the first 30 to 40 years of the Church) the Apostle Paul, himself, would observe the Law when he was with the Jewish people and would not be observing it when he was in the company of the Gentile peoples—see I Cor. 9:20,21.

## II. The Occasion

What was the occasion for this problem in Corinth? Verse 33 (and 20) answers that question by saying, "when ye come together **to eat.**" Paul emphasizes the fact that division happened on the occasion of their gathering together to eat—

- a. "you come together not for the better, but for the worse" (v. 17).
- b. "when you come together in the assembly" (v. 18).
- c. "when you come together, therefore, into one (place), ...to eat" (v. 20).
- d. "one is hungry, and another is drunken" (v.21).
- e. "when you come together to eat" (v. 33).

This meant that the sickening problem had occurred at a general gathering of the whole assembly—both Jews and Gentiles—for the purpose of eating together.

We have every reason to believe that the Corinthian assembly ate many common meals together. This had been a custom in the early church from the beginning—see Acts 2:42, 46. No doubt, this practice originally stemmed from the spontaneous joy they had in the Holy Spirit, and because of their anticipation of the Lord's soon return to restore all things—see Acts 3:19-21. Soon these communal meals brought some problems that were solved by the Holy Spirit's guidance—Acts 6:1,2. Later when Gentiles were added to the fellowship of the early church, divine revelation was needed in order to convince the Jews that they could eat with the Gentiles—see Acts 10:9-16 & 11:2-12.

The common meals that the early assemblies had were a vital part of their fellowship. They are mentioned in I Peter 2:13 where false prophets had come in and feasted with the saints. In Jude 12 they are described as "love feasts." They have also been variously described in uninspired writings of early origin. We need not mention the many historical references to such common suppers among Jews and Christians (see those compilations of Gavin and Edersheim which are taken from such sources as Josephus, Pliny, and Ignatius).

It is also to be noted that the words of I Cor. 11:33 are similar in nature to those of Acts 20:7 where the church of Troas gathered together for the same purpose—

"Upon the first day of the week, when the disciples **came together to break bread,** Paul

preached unto them..." (Acts 20:7).

"Wherefore, my brethren, **when you come together to eat**, tarry one for another" (I Cor.11:33).

The language of Acts and I Cor. is similar and they indicate this was a gathering together of each of the local congregations to eat a common meal. Acts 20:7 is not a Sunday morning observance of the Lord's Supper as many have presumed. Rather, it was simply a gathering of the local congregation most probably on a Saturday (or possibly Sunday) evening to eat a common meal together before they had a meeting with the Apostle Paul being present to address them. The Jewish reckoning of days always begins at sunset—hence, "the first day of the week" began at sunset on our Saturday. With the passing of the Sabbath at sunset Saturday, the Jewish brethren could freely prepare and travel to such a meeting. It was obviously an evening meal because afterwards Paul preached until midnight. The expression "breaking bread" simply has reference to any common meal as a look in your concordance will prove (see—Mark 6:41; 8:6 & 19; Lk. 9:16; 24:30; Acts 2:46; 27:35, etc.).

That the Corinthians had the same type of communal meals together is to be understood. On one or more of these occasions the interjection of the Lord's Supper had been made. Their common meals were disorderly enough, but to interject the Lord's Supper in a divisive manner made them worthy of the condemnation that they had received. In verse 20 Paul introduces us to this expression "the Lord's Supper." And that introduces us to a very important question—

### III. What is "The Lord's Supper"??

You probably already know what "The Lord's Supper" is in your particular denominational church program. However, the question I am asking is—just what does the **biblical** expression, "Lord's Supper," mean?

That Paul is talking about the same supper Christ ate with the Apostles on the night of His betrayal there is no mistaking—Paul states clearly, "that the Lord Jesus, **the same night in which He was betrayed** took bread" (I Cor. 11:23). In addition, note the many points of harmony between Paul's words and those of Luke's account of the Last Supper:

#### I Cor. 11:23-25

1. "took bread
2. when He had given thanks
3. brake it
4. this is My body
5. broken for you
6. this do in remembrance of Me
7. took the cup
8. when He had supped
9. is the New Covenant
10. in My blood"

#### Luke 22:19,20

- "took bread
- and gave thanks
- brake it
- this is My body
- given for you
- this do in remembrance of Me
- likewise the cup
- after supper
- is the New Covenant
- in My blood"

Just as surely as we can identify the particular "supper" that **Paul** was concerned with, so it is we can identify that particular "supper" that **Christ** was concerned with, and this will answer the question for us—"what is the 'Lord's Supper'?" We shall see that it is, in fact, "The Lord's

**Passover Supper.**" This may prove to be very disconcerting to many devout observers of their "Holy Communion." Nevertheless, what I have just said is a well established fact to any honest reader of the Bible. I hope that you will be a "noble Berean" (Acts 17:10,11), and continue to study this subject with an open Bible—and an open heart.

Note the many references in Luke's account that establish this fact:

22:1 "Now the feast of Unleavened Bread drew nigh, which is called the **Passover.**"

22:7 "Then came the day of Unleavened Bread when the **Passover** must be killed."

22:8 "And the Lord sent Peter and John, saying, go and prepare us the **Passover** that we may eat."

22:11 "...where I shall eat the **Passover** with my disciples."

22:13 "...and they made ready the **Passover.**"

22:15 "With desire I have desired to eat this **Passover** with you before I suffer."

(See also **Passover** in Matt. 26:17,18,19 and Mark 14:12,14,16.)

In addition to the word "Passover," the word "**supper**" is used four times throughout this meal to further describe it. It is used twice at the beginning of the meal (John 13:2 & John 13:4). Once it is used to describe the whole of the meal (John 21:20). And once the literal word "supped" is translated "supper" sometime during the close of that Passover meal (Luke 22:20). The only use of the word "supper" in the Gospel accounts is to identify the Passover meal that they were eating on this occasion—

Jn. 13:2 "...And **supper** being ended (lit. taking place)."

Jn. 13:4 "He riseth from **supper**, (to wash their feet)."

Jn. 21:20 "which also leaned on His breast at **supper.**"

Lk. 22:20 "likewise the cup after **supper** (lit. after supping)."

The word "supper," in these passages, is **never** used of anything other than the Passover. The Greek word used for "supper" simply means the primary meal of the day whether it be eaten at noon or in the evening. It can be called their dinner or supper. Nor did the Apostles eat two suppers—just one! Nor is there the slightest hint that Christ instituted a different "supper" at the close of the "Passover Supper." The blessing of the cup, both at the beginning and end of the supper is still, till this day, a vital part of the **Passover** Feast. These are the emphatic facts of the case! Christ had great "desire" in eating this Passover Supper with the apostles.

Putting the words "Passover" and "Supper" together we can call the meal "the Passover Supper." In addition, we must remember that this Passover Supper was called "**The Lord's**" from the very beginning of its inception—Exo. 12:11; Exo. 12:27 and Lev. 23:5. Therefore, the fullest designation of this very important meal was "**The Lord's Passover Supper.**" A short designation would simply be that used by the Apostle Paul—"the **Lord's Supper.**" This supper received its character from the Lord—both as it was originally instituted and as Christ clarified its meaning to the disciples on the night of His betrayal.

Since the word "supper" in the Gospel accounts only refers to the Lord's Passover meal, and since the Apostle Paul is clearly referring to that "Supper," then only a warped exposition—demanded by long tradition—could ever come up with a different "supper."

There is only one dinner or Supper that was ever designated as "The Lord's" and that was the Passover! The theory that the Passover and the Lord's Supper are two different meals is strictly imaginary and presumptuous. Religious traditions are not always synonymous with

biblical facts! Christ did not institute a “New Supper” after He had eaten the Passover Supper. Rather, He "greatly desired to eat this Passover" (Luke 22:15) with His Apostles in order to give new truths to the **Passover Supper** which would confirm the Israelitish Kingdom promises.

Remember also, that this "Supper" is to have its "fulfillment" in the future "Kingdom of God" (Luke 22:16) and it will also be eaten once again by all the participants in that future Kingdom (Luke 22:18, 29 & 30). In other words, this particular "Supper" has nothing whatsoever to do with the Church of Jesus Christ! The Jewish brethren will observe this Supper during the transition time period just like they did all the other aspects of the Law. However, it is characteristically NOT designed for the "Church which is Christ's body." Likewise, it has been said by others, "since the **Head** of the church has clearly stated that He is not going to eat this Supper until the Messianic Kingdom arrives, why should the **Body** of the Church be eating it? Who says the "Body" should do what the "Head" is NOT doing?

Therefore, we must conclude, that if the Lord Jesus Christ was talking about the "Lord's Passover Supper" so was the Apostle Paul, because they are talking about the same identical meal. Many will struggle against the “pricks” of this conclusion just as Saul of Tarsus struggled when he learned that Jesus, whom he was persecuting, was indeed the Lord of heaven and the Messiah. It took several days of solitude for Saul to sort out his misconceptions and prepare himself for the Lord's next direction. What about you???

Consequently, when we identify the "Lord's Supper" in I Cor. 11—which had become an occasion for schismatic division among the Corinthians—as the Jewish **Passover** Supper, then we will have a whole new perspective in the interpretation of this passage of Scripture.

#### IV. The Divisive Nature

A key factor in understanding this problem in the Corinthian church is to remember the **severe divisive** nature of their actions. I Cor. 11:20 starts off with the words, "When ye come together, THEREFORE, into one place..." The word "**therefore**" signifies that what Paul is going to say is predicated upon what he has said earlier in the immediate context—see verses 17-19.

The problem that Paul will be discussing actually centers around the divisive effect it was having in the local assembly. Such division as was occurring in this context seems to go beyond that which was indicated in the earlier chapters of the Epistle (see I Cor. 1:10,11 & 3:1-4). In this case Paul uses a much stronger word to show the direction of the division. That word is "**heresies**," meaning the actual breaking up of the group into sects. Since this was occurring during their gathering together to eat, it could very well imply visible groupings into factions.

What they were doing was so disorderly that it seems to the Apostle hard to believe. Therefore, he allows some doubt as to the complete truthfulness of the report—"I partly believe it," Paul says. But Paul quickly justifies the fact that the report is basically true by stating a prophetic principle, "For there must also be heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you" (v:19). Some believers would stand true to God, signifying their approval by God.

With these words we can see the deep seriousness of this particular problem. Likewise, when we note in the conclusion of the discussion that Paul says death and sickness had come upon certain members of the congregation as discipline from God, then we can get the total

picture as to how serious was the nature of their carnality. To use the Lord's Passover Supper in a fictitious manner and to add gluttony, drunkenness and impatience in the same proximity brought the most severe discipline from God. The actual disciplinary powers of the Kingdom were manifested.

Perhaps the variableness in the date of the celebration of the Passover meal brought some confusion in arranging for a fellowship dinner. Those unclean for the regular celebration could eat the Passover a month later according to the Law (Num. 9:9-12). At the time of Christ there was a pre-Passover supper practiced as well as the regular Passover supper. It is noteworthy that Christ, Himself, ate the earlier meal and then was sacrificed at the very time of the sacrificing of the Passover lambs. (This is explained in detail in my study *Christ Our Passover*.) Many Bible teachers have observed this fact in the past. It is also a fact that the Jews scattered throughout the world today still eat the Passover on two successive nights to this very day. Nevertheless, there was no excuse for the deliberate divisiveness that occurred on these occasions.

It would be further inconceivable to think that the Jewish brethren would bring the Passover Supper into a general gathering of the saints for all of them to eat together. The assembly was largely made up of Gentiles (Acts 18:4,6,8-10) who had no right to even be exposed to the Passover Supper (Exo. 12:43-48). The Gentile believers were instructed to "observe no such thing" (Acts 15:24 & 21:25).

However, it is not inconceivable that certain of the Jewish brethren would bring their own Passover Suppers into a general gathering of the church during one of its common meals together for **divisive purposes**. Nor is it inconceivable that some of the false Jewish teachers who had visited Corinth would encourage such observance. If such were the case, it would not be the first time that the eating of Jewish meals had become a divisive activity in the Church. In the book of Galatians we read about that very thing happening in the assembly in Antioch—see Galatians 2:11-14.

When the Apostle Peter visited that assembly he freely ate with the Gentiles at first. Later some important(?) Jewish brethren came to Antioch from James and they would not eat with the rest of the Gentiles. Consequently, Peter also separated himself, out of fear, to eat exclusively with the Jewish members of the congregation. This observance of the Jewish kosher meals was so firmly set in their thinking that even Paul's long-time companion in the ministry, Barnabas, was caught away with the other Jews in the "dissimulation" that was resulting. This hypocritical action was not only causing division, but it also had the effect of "**Judaizing**" (Gal. 2:14, see Strong & Vine) the Gentiles who wanted to eat with them also. The Gentiles were forced to adopt the Jewish kosher meals if they wanted to fellowship with these notable brethren. This was the basis for Paul's public rebuke of the Apostle Peter (Gal. 2:11-14).

We see, therefore, that division had been caused, just a few years earlier, by the divisive use of the exclusive Jewish meals being inserted in the midst of the association of a local assembly. I believe this is an example of what was happening in this situation in the Corinthian assembly—except now it was the Jewish Passover Supper inserted.

## V. Basic Interpretation

There are three basic interpretations of Paul's words in I Corinthians 11:20—

"When ye come together, therefore, into one place,  
**this is not to eat the Lord's Supper,**"  
(KJV and very literal and accurate).

**No. 1.** Taking the verse literally as it reads, it means when the Corinthians came together—that is, when they all assembled together for the purpose of eating as in verse 33—they were **not** to be eating the Lord's Supper.

This is a direct statement of fact, telling them what they are NOT to be doing!

Alford, in his very highly acclaimed *Critical Greek New Testament And Exegetical Commentary* observed that the literal translation of the verse is—"**it is not to eat the Lord's supper.**" Alford took the position that this means, "there could be no intention of celebrating the Lord's Supper." There is no question that this is the literal translation. See also *Youngs, Literal translation, Conybeare & Howson, the Roman Catholic New American Bible, especially the J.N. Darby Translation, or any Interlinear Greek New Testament, etc.*

A. E. Knoch, in his *Concordant Literal New Testament* took pride in also showing some of the tenses of the verbs. In this case, "to eat" is an active, aorist, infinitive verb. Thus, he translated the passage—

"Then, at your coming together in the same place,  
**it is not to be eating the Lord's dinner...**"

This language is actually very plain and simple. However, most scholars will **oppose** the literal rendering simply because they all **suppose** that it was God's design and order for the churches to assemble for the purpose of eating the Lord's Supper. This is expounded on in a standard work called *The Expositors' Greek New Testament*, edited by W. Robertson Nicholl, *Vol. II, I Corinthians*, by G.G. Findlay. Findlay said that the passage, "can hardly mean '**it is not to eat the Lord's supper**' (so Alford and others)—for the Corinthians intended this, but by unworthy behavior (26f.) neutralized their purpose."

G.G. Findlay goes on to state the other two positions:

**No. 2.** "It (**your feast**) is not an eating of the Lord's Supper," and/or

**No. 3.** "It is not (**possible**) to eat the Lord's Supper."

These last two positions (especially the third) are assumed by the majority of interpreters. However, if we do not insert the thought of "*possible*," but acknowledge the real identity of the supper as the "Lord's **Passover** Supper," then, I believe, interpretation "**No. 1.**" automatically becomes the only acceptable interpretation of the passage.

Obviously, if this is the Lord's Passover Supper being brought over into the Corinthian common meals, then no conservative dispensational teacher would object to the first and literal understanding of Paul's words. Why, "of course," we would all acknowledge, the Passover Feast should never be brought over into a common meal in any of the local churches. That Feast was strictly for the believing Jews in the assembly and didn't belong in a general gathering of the whole church. When I say, "nobody would object," there are exceptions to be sure. Certain religious groups do recognize that Paul is talking about the Lord's Passover Supper in this context. And yet they still believe they should observe it once a year as a Feast meal just exactly as the Jews did. The "World Wide Church of God" started by Herbert W. Armstrong is one

example. They would simply say that the only problem in the Corinthian assembly was haste, drunkenness and division in the celebration of Passover—and we should still observe the Feast today.

*The Revised Version* and *The American Standard Version* tried to be more literal in their translations. At the same time, they chose to reflect the idea of most interpreters by inserting, "it is not **possible** to eat the Lord's supper." However, *The New American Standard Version* went back to the accurate literal translation and eliminated the "possible,"—

**"Therefore, when you meet together, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper."**

## VI. Words of Correction.

Let us remember that the words of the Apostle, as recorded in verse 20, are designed to be the remedy for the problem as stated in verses 17-19. Verse 20 has the effect of a sharp, forceful command that eliminates the divisive factor.

We should also understand that Paul is not against the observance of the Lord's Passover Supper any more than he is against their regular fellowship meals. What he is against is the combination of the two for divisive purposes.

If we keep in mind the fact that the Passover Supper was a "Feast" and not a sacramental snack of later invention, we can understand that it would fit perfectly with their fellowship dinners. The Lord's Supper was a full scale meal—the principle meal of the day—literally, a Feast. Gluttony and drunkenness could easily have been committed in their carnality. Certainly no one can be a glutton at a modern "holy communion," and the only one who could ever get drunk today would be a priest in a Roman Catholic mass who drinks the wine, especially when they have several Masses in a row. The biblical words "**supper**" and "come together **to eat**," when applied to a modern day "Holy Communion" or "Lord's Supper," make absolute nonsense. They are in contradiction to each other. Who goes to a modern day Holy Communion service, as held in most churches, "to eat a supper" in the Biblical sense of the word?? Nobody does! If you so much as tried to do so, they would, no doubt, promptly expel you from their "sacred snack" (if a small piece of cracker and a little sip of grape juice can even be called a "snack").

Believing then, that certain of the Jewish believers at Corinth had, for divisive reasons, brought their Passover Suppers to one or more of the typical communal fellowship meals which the whole assembly partook of, we will be able to see more meaning in Paul's words of correction than before—see verses 21 and 22—

**"For in eating every one takes before the other his own supper:"**

It is a fact, that the Passover Supper was primarily a private meal, to be eaten by only a few families, at the most, in one home. This is clearly how Christ last ate it the night of His betrayal. Christ had not gathered all the disciples together for the purpose of instituting a general communal meal as is done in modern Christendom. It was a private Passover meal in keeping with the laws that governed the observance of the Feast.

In Corinth, we would understand that some of the Jews (and probably a mixture of Gentiles as well) purposefully ate those suppers early, in a divisive manner, so that most of the other members could not join them. Groups like these could feel very exclusive in having their "own suppers."

"and one is hungry, and another is drunken" (v. 21).

A typical fellowship dinner was for the whole assembly jointly. With some members eating their "own suppers" early, those who came later found some people drunk and less food available to satisfy their own hunger.

"What? have ye not houses to eat and drink in?" (v. 22).

This statement could include a direct reference to the fact that the Passover Supper was to be eaten in the homes and not in the assembly of the believers. We know Paul later admonishes them to stay at home if they are going to act like hungry gluttons (v. 34).

"or despise ye the Church of God" (v. 22).

In Romans 14:17 Paul states the principle for this Church Dispensation that "the Kingdom of God is not meat and drink." This meant that the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ was to have no ritual meals and no ritual foods. This stands in vivid contrast to the words of Christ to the 12 Apostles that they would "eat and drink" the Passover Supper new with Him in the Kingdom (that is, in the Millennial reign). See Luke 22:30.

It is also vitally important to remember, that in very close proximity to this text of I Corinthians 11, Paul gave the following command—

"Whether therefore ye eat or drink... do all to the glory of God.  
Give none offense, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles,  
**nor to the Church of God.**" (I Cor. 10:31, 32).

This conduct among the Corinthians in their eating and drinking constituted an offense to the Church of God. This type of supper (i.e., the Passover) was not for the general assembly of the Church of God, nor was the gluttony and drunkenness mingled with it.

"and shame them that have not," (v. 22).

Most certainly this was an embarrassment to a lot of people who were not supposed to have this particular meal—being Gentiles (not just poor people).

There was certainly no praise that Paul could give them for this type of carnality. The holiness and sacred character of the Lord's Passover Supper was still being faithfully observed by all believing Jews among the Christian assemblies throughout the world. However, it was observed privately in their homes and not to be mixed in a general gathering of the assembly. The Lord's Supper was most surely to be eaten by the Jewish believers, but not in such a carnal design as had happened at Corinth.

## **VII. The Sacred Character of the Lord's Supper.**

Let us remember that at this time Paul was **not** discouraging the Jewish believers from eating the Lord's Passover Supper. On the contrary, he is going to encourage it during this transition period of the early Church history. Paul, himself, would pause in Philippi for the days of Unleavened Bread (Acts 20:6). All the believing Jews were still partaking of all the regular Feast days (Acts 18:21; 20:16; 21:20). It is not until the close of the book of Acts time period, when the books of Hebrews, Ephesians, Philippians and Colossians are written, that the believing Jews are given information that would stop the practice of the Law with its ritual meals

(see Heb. 9:1,10; 8:13; Eph. 2:15; Col. 2:16; and I Tim. 4:4,5). What Paul was discouraging was the eating of the Lord's Passover Supper when the whole church gathered together for a common meal.

In verses 23-32 Paul reiterates the sacred character of the Lord's Supper so that the Corinthians (especially the Jews) will appreciate the need for proper order in its observance. It was necessary that the whole assembly be aware of the unique doctrinal and dispensational truths taught in the Passover subject. Therefore, the Apostle had already delivered these truths to the assembly, and now he would remind them again of the beautiful typology that points to Christ. This does not mean that the whole assembly was to partake of it—they were not.

In this connection, an interesting observation is made in the *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary* about the Lord's Supper itself—"The fact that we not only show the Lord's death in the supper, but eat and drink the pledge of it, could only be understood by the **Jew**, accustomed to such feasts after propitiatory sacrifices, as implying our personal appropriation therein of the benefits of that death."

Unlike the unbelieving Jews, who were only partaking of that Feast in a mechanical way, the saved Jews could partake of it with renewed devotion to Jesus Christ of Whom it clearly spoke. They also still anticipated His coming to rule and reign in the Kingdom. This is the "coming" of Christ that is in view in this Supper—see Luke 22:16,29,30. This hope will not end until Israel is clearly set aside and the Church of Jesus Christ will stand alone in God's dispensational program. The Gentiles were only spectators in regards to these sacred truths that primarily pertained to the Jewish brethren.

### **VIII. The Fading Hope in The Lord's Passover Supper**

All must remember that the book of Acts history (including these problems at Corinth) was transitional in nature. One program will be phasing out while another distinct program is phasing in. The revelations about pure Christianity and its total separation from the ritual "meats and drinks and baptisms" (Heb. 9:10) of the Law system, are progressively unfolding. (Please ask for an important Bible study about "*The Transition In The Book of Acts*" time period.)

When we talk about the phasing out of one program and the bringing in of another, of necessity, we must also talk about the two distinct "hopes" that will be in view during this transition period. The Jewish brethren will still be anticipating the possibility of the Messiah (Christ) returning to restore and build again the Kingdom (Acts 3:19-21). Christ had told the disciples on the night of His betrayal that as often as they would eat the Passover in the future they were to be doing so in expectation of His coming in the Kingdom—"till He come." The coming of Christ in the Kingdom was the hope of Israel. It also involved the Israelitish New Covenant being established (Jer. 31:31 and Heb.8:8) at that time. However, as official Israel continues to reject their resurrected Messiah, those Kingdom hopes fade. The arrival of large numbers of Gentiles being saved and set free from the Law system also brought in another hope—the mystery hope of the Rapture of the Church which is Christ's body (I Thess. 4:13-18; I Cor. 15:51,52, etc.).

When the revelation came that the Law with its meats and drinks is abolished and terminated, it meant that the Jewish brethren would cease the eating of the Passover meals. They would no longer be expecting the Messiah to come to immediately restore Israel. They would fully realize their being in the joint body with all its fullness and with its distinctive hope of the

Rapture. Jewish believers and Gentile believers would then be walking together in the full "unity of the faith" (Eph. 4:1-6).

In the future, after the Rapture of the Church, the saved Jewish people of the Tribulation period would once again take up the observance of the Law with its Passover Supper pointing to the second coming of Jesus Christ the Messiah of Israel—they will, indeed, "show forth the Lord's death till He comes" during the future great Tribulation time period.

#### VIV. Paul's Revelations

That such revelation concerning the Jewish Passover Supper was given to the Apostle Paul who was "the Apostle to the Gentile peoples" is not contradictory as some Ultra-dispensationalists would like to think. Though Paul's commission as an Apostle was uniquely to the Gentile peoples, it also included going to the "children of Israel," (Acts 9:15). In this connection Paul was "an able minister of the New Covenant" (II Cor. 3:6), and the Supper was "New Covenant" truth. Needless to say, the "New Covenant" was strictly Israelitish in nature—Jer. 31:31; Hebrews 8:8 and Romans 9:4. That the "new Covenant" applies to the Church of Jesus Christ is another grandiose presumption of modern traditional Christendom. Though there are similarities between certain aspects of the New Covenant with truths about this Church age, nevertheless, they are not identical.

We read how the Apostle Peter received divine revelation of things pertaining to the Gentiles (Acts 10), even though he was an Apostle to the Circumcision (Gal. 2:7). So it was with Paul—he received divine revelation of things pertaining to the Jews, even though he was "the Apostle to the Gentile peoples" (Rom. 11:13).

Since the Israelitish Kingdom power was still in evidence at this time, the carnal activity of the Corinthians was met with automatic physical discipline from God. This is similar to the sudden deaths of Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11). Actually, the Passover observance always had strict discipline to follow against any who would violate its order—see Exo. 12:15 and 12:19 as examples.

The very obvious fact that such disciplinary action does not follow in Christendom's crude caricature of the Supper today, should make it evident that this Supper has ceased in God's plan and program, and that what is being done in Christendom is something entirely different.

Another immediate example of the cessation of a custom practiced in the early church was the miraculous gifts of I Cor. 12-14. The practice of these gifts was strictly transitional in nature, and like the celebration of this Passover Supper, they ceased to be practiced after the close of the book of Acts.

#### X. In Conclusion

We must remember that Paul's words in I Cor. 11:20 were designed to be the remedy for the problem stated in verses 17-19. Whatever was causing the division had to be eliminated. Consequently, verse 20 can be understood as a direct command—"When you come together, therefore, into one place, **it is not to eat the Lord's Supper.**" The interjection of the "Lord's Supper" into their general gathering had obviously caused the division. It was God's order for the church to assemble for fellowship meals, and it was also God's will for the Jewish brethren to

have their Passover meal. However, it was NOT God's will for the two to be mixed where factions had resulted and disorder in the Passover observance had occurred. It is a historical fact that the carryover of this "Lord's Supper" into Christendom (in a radically modified form) has perpetually caused more divisions than perhaps any other single factor in time.

When the Lord Jesus Christ charged the twelve Jewish Apostles to continue observing the Passover Supper in the light of the revelations He had placed upon it, then, they could look forward to the next Passover Supper with a spiritual intelligence and zeal they never had before. Ceil and Moishe Rosen, in their recent book, "Christ in the Passover," state very plainly in these words,

"The early Jewish Christians **incorporated into their own Passover services** the spiritual lessons, customs, and insights taught them by Jesus Himself at the Last Supper. Because these early Jewish Christians at first were considered an acceptable sect of Judaism, some of their customs and interpretations became a part of the Passover ritual at that time." (Pg. 91, Moody Press, Chicago, 1978.)

Thus, the Jewish brethren who would continue to partake of the Lord's Passover Supper, as Christ had instructed them, would most certainly want to "examine themselves."

In light of Paul's rebukes to them, they would have to ask themselves what their purpose in doing it was. God forbid, that it should be for divisive purposes, as it had been in the past! Would they not be ashamed of any drunkenness and gluttony and make sure that it would not happen again? Actually, the whole assembly stood guilty for allowing such disorder to reign in their midst—and the chastening hand of God had been evident. (It was also a tradition of the Passover celebration for such examinations to be made.)

Verse 20 is a direct command telling the Corinthian assembly to not be eating or mixing the Lord's Passover Supper when they assemble for a general fellowship meal. Verses 21-32 are parenthetical in nature describing the holiness of the Supper. Now verse 33 once again resumes at that point—"when you are gathered together to eat."

Verses 33 and 34 now complete the initial correction that Paul had made in verse 20. When the brethren now assembled together to eat—not the Lord's Passover Supper—but their common meals, they could wait for all to arrive and they could eat in unity instead of division. If any were so hungry so as to make a glutton of themselves they should, indeed, stay home, and finally, there would not be God's disciplinary judgment upon them.

### **By Way of Summery**

- 1.) Very sad divisions had occurred among the Corinthian assembly.
- 2.) This had happened when they came together into one place to eat.
- 3.) It was caused by the observance of the Lord's Passover Supper early during such a communal meal.
- 4.) They were not to observe the Lord's Supper when they all came together to eat a common meal.
- 5.) Mingled with drunkenness and gluttony it was a shame to those who did not have it, and an offense to the Church of Jesus Christ.
- 6.) The Passover Supper was certainly holy in the proper place, especially for believing Jews still anticipating the kingdom.

- 7.) Because of this ritual carnality and serious divisiveness God meted out severe discipline.
- 8.) There was to be a special reverence for the observance of the Passover meal because of the special sacredness assigned to it by the Lord.
- 9.) With the elimination of the Passover Supper from any communal meal they could proceed with patience and joint concern for everybody.
- 10) This way they would avoid the severe disciplinary judgment.

#### ADDITIONAL NOTES:

- 1.) A statement from the popular *Jamieson, Fausset and Brown Commentary* illustrates the thought given by most expositors on this passage—"therefore, you Corinthians ought to separate common meals from the Lord's Supper. [Bengel]." (Vol. 2, page 285).
- 2.) *Barnes' Notes on the New Testament* says concerning the meal of verse 33, "Doddridge understands this of the feast that he supposes to have preceded the Lord's Supper." (page 762).
- 3.) On the other occasions where these Greek words *ouk estin* ("it is not") are used the meaning is always the same and never needs a qualifier—
  - a. "for if I preach the gospel, **it is not** to boast." (I Cor. 9:16)
  - b. "for the body indeed, **it is not** one member but many." (12:14)
  - c. "not for this, **it is not** of the body." (12:15, 16)
  - d. "if a resurrection of dead person **it is not**, neither is Christ raised." (15:13)
  - e. "the labor of you, **it is not** in vain in the Lord." (15:58)
- 4.) One tract, put out by a Plymouth Brethren group says, "in the 11th chapter of I Corinthians we see the Church in its assembled capacity and purpose, 'to eat the Lord's Supper,' (verse 20)." The truth of the matter is just the opposite! The church in its assembled capacity was **"NOT to be eating the Lord's Supper!"**
- 5.) There are four things that are distinctly Jewish in this context—One, The Lord's Passover Supper; Two, The New Covenant; Three, The Messianic Kingdom appearing of Christ; and Four, The "Powers of the Kingdom" (Matt. 16:19; 18:18).
- 6.) As long as one understands that the Lord's Supper, spoken of in this context, was in fact, the Passover Supper, it really doesn't matter how most others translate the passage, because it would usually amount to the same fact—the church collectively was not, should not, or could not be observing it. The following translate the verse (20) inaccurately—
 

"...it is not the Lord's Supper you eat." (NIV).

"...it is not possible to eat the Lord's Supper." (ASV).

"...it is impossible for you to eat the Lord's Supper." (NEB).
- 7.) "Till He come," was commented on by one expositor (*J.F.B.* Vol. 2, pg. 285) in this manner, "'till He come'—**when there shall be no longer need of symbols of His body**, the body

itself being manifested."

It is surprising how many assume this understanding. Even the Ultradispensationalist, Charles F. Baker, in his text book, *A Dispensational Theology*, (Pg. 539) says, "...when Christ is present upon earth there will be no need of a memorial."

This is a very interesting thought, but not at all accurate in this context. These authors think, as do others, that after Christ returns there will no longer be a need to observe the Lord's Supper. This sounds logical and consistent to their present system, but it is Scripturally erroneous. Actually, the Scripture not only says the Lord's Supper was eaten when Christ was bodily PRESENT the first time but, it will be eaten **again** when Christ physically RETURNS to earth the second time (Luke 22:15,16 & verses 29,30). Christ specifically said, "I will eat it new with you in My Father's Kingdom," (Luke 22:16,18; Mark 14:25; Matt. 26:29). Today, we have the Holy Spirit present and the body that is being manifested is the spiritual body of Christ, which in fact "worships God in the Spirit, and has no confidence in the flesh" (Philip. 3:3).

Consequently, a more accurate Biblical deduction emerges—When you have Christ, the King of the Jews, bodily PRESENT, or ANTICIPATED, then you will also have a physical memorial Passover Supper present. Whereas, today, Christ is physically absent, and the Holy Spirit is present to minister to us the spiritual realities in Christ, and we need no physical memorial because, "we worship God in Spirit and in truth." Since Christ will NOT be eating that Supper UNTIL that future day, it behooves the Church to not be eating it, either. Should the "Body" be doing something the "Head" is NOT DOING?

In conclusion, the only "feast" that remains to be observed by the Church is that spoken of by Paul in I Cor. 5:8, "Therefore, let us keep the feast, not with old leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth."

Of course, the "natural man" is not at all satisfied with this feast. It does not cater to his flesh. Since "ritualism is still the most popular religion in the world," carnal Christians will turn again to the physical senses. From the very chapter in the Bible that actually forbids the celebration of the Lord's Passover Supper in any general assembly of believers, they will blindly quote certain verses in order to justify the modern idolatrous ritual. They will even do so in great pretended "humiliation."

THE END