

The "Lord's Supper"

Brief Thoughts on Israel's Passover



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For those of us who recognize the distinct ministry of Paul the apostle, there is only one key passage dealing with the so-called "*Lord's Supper*" (I Corinthians 11:20-34).

Some hold that this passage gives the authority to observe the religious rite of "Communion." However, under grace we are free from all ceremonies, all rituals and all rites, including the "*Lord's Supper*." We make an appeal to our readers for a closer look at this passage, as well as the entire subject of the "*Lord's Supper*."

THE TIMING

The letter of I Corinthians falls into the category of Paul's epistles that were written during what we sometimes refer to as the "Acts Period" (the time period covered by the events that are recorded in the Book of Acts). It is one of 6 books written by Paul during this time period – the Infancy Epistles. During the Acts Period there was a transition from God's program with the twelve apostles and Israel to Paul and the Body of Christ.¹

THE BACKGROUND

Acts 18 contains the record of Paul's apostolic work at the city of Corinth. A simple reading of this chapter will reveal the great Jewish influence surrounding Paul's ministry there.

Coming to Corinth, Paul lived and worked with a Jew named Aquilla and his wife Priscilla (:1-3). Every Sabbath Paul taught in the synagogue (:4). Afterwards he began teaching at the home of Titus Justus which was adjacent to the synagogue (:7). Even the chief of the synagogue, Crispus, believed along with his entire house (:8).

1. For a closer look at the subject of Paul's epistles written during the "Acts Period," see the booklet "*Rightly Dividing Paul's Epistles*," by Dee McCroskey (Available for \$2 postage paid).

The circumstances surrounding some of the details at Corinth were true “*because of the Jews*” (cf. 16:3). This fundamental background is essential for a proper understanding of much that is written in Paul’s two letters to the saints at Corinth.

In fact, when writing to the Corinthians, Paul specifically addressed members of the Body of Christ who had a Jewish heritage (“*all our fathers*,” 10:1-6), as well a Gentile one (“*you^p were Gentiles*,” 12:1-2).

Examples of the “*because of the Jews*” issues are tongues (14:1-40) and other sign gifts (12:8-10, 28-31).

Because of the timing and nature of this letter, there is clear transitional information (from Israel to the Body of Christ) found in I Corinthians, such as Paul’s marital instruction (“*I would that all men were even as I myself*,” 7:6-8) which was due to “*the present distress*” (:26), leading him to perceive that “*the time is short*” (:29). As this transition began to come to a close, and Paul had received “*the abundance of revelations*” (II Corinthians 12:7), this marital instruction was later reversed (“*I will therefore that the younger³ marry*” I Timothy 5:14).

It is important to understand that Paul had a guiding principle during the Acts Period:

Unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them who are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them who are under the law (I Corinthians 9:20).

Paul was faithful to that principle during the transition, as can be seen in his travel to Jerusalem where he participated in a Jewish vow (Acts 21:18-26).

THE TEXT

I Corinthians 11:20-34 is the only Pauline passage concerning the so-called “*Lord’s Supper*.” Interestingly enough, this is *not* a doctrinal (instructional) passage, but a corrective passage.

It seems strange that, if members of Christ’s Body were to observe a supper ritual, Paul would not have first given us a doctrinal (instructional) passage teaching us the place and purpose of this “*Supper*” before issuing correction about its abuse.

The fact is that we do not find *any* doctrinal (instructional) passage in Paul’s epistles for the “*Lord’s Supper*”; only a *corrective* one.

Paul’s divine pattern was (1) teaching (2) exposure (3) correction (II Timothy 3:16). If the Corinthians had not had a problem, then we never would have heard of Paul on this issue!

2. The subscript “p” indicates the plural “you” as indicated by the old English “ye.”

3. The word “younger” is the Greek word νεώτερος (neōteros) meaning “youthful” (Strong, Thayer). There is no Greek word for “women” in the verse (as it appears “younger women” in the KJV), although contextually, the younger are “women” and are likely the “younger widows” of :11. Some translations have “younger widows” in :14 (such as CV, Moffatt, God’s Word), although this is not a translation, but interpretation, seeing that there is no Greek word here for “widows.” The *Concordant Greek Text* simply reads “younger (feminine) [gender].” The 1930 CV has “widow” in brackets, while the current CV has it in light font.

No new revelation is given by Paul on the “*Lord’s Supper*.” This “*supper*” was not a part of the revelation of the mystery.

The institution of the Lord’s Supper was no secret. The Apostle Paul received no further teaching regarding it than could be gathered from the records in the ospels.⁴

THE NEGATIVE

Interestingly enough, Paul starts off this passage by telling us that, when members of the Body of Christ gather, it was *not* for the purpose of eating “*Lord’s Supper!*”

*When you_p come together therefore into one place, this is **NOT TO EAT** the Lord’s supper (I Corinthians 11:20).*

*Then, at your coming together in the same place, it is **NOT TO BE EATING** the Lord’s dinner (CV).*

THE POSITIVE

Since Paul was not at the “*Last Supper*,” the Lord revealed to him the details of that night. This was done so that he might be able to correct the problem at Corinth properly in light of the “*Supper’s*” true Jewish meaning and purpose.

Therefore, Paul “*received of the Lord*” (:23) information concerning that night, but this was *not* in any way a part of *the mystery* – the new special revelation to be given to him. Nothing new was revealed to Paul – it was a revelation which simply brought him up-to-date concerning what had transpired that particular night.

GOLDEN RULES OF BIBLE STUDY

*Study to show yourself approved to God, a workman who needs not to be ashamed, **rightly dividing the Word of Truth** (II Timothy 2:15).*

God has designed a certain *way* by which we are to study the Scriptures. We are to **RIGHTLY DIVIDE** them. This is the divinely approved approach to the study of His Word.

Miles Coverdale (1488-1569) articulated well the important principles of right division in the introduction to his 1535 English version of the Bible:

It shall greatly help ye to understand Scripture if thou mark not only what is spoken or written, but of whom, with what words, at what time, where, to what intent, with what circumstances, considering what goeth before and what followeth after.⁵

We must be honest with ourselves when studying the Scriptures. Accurate Bible study must fol-

4. Charles H. Welch, *The Dispensational Place of the Lord’s Supper*, Berean Publishing Trust.

5. Miles Coverdale, *Coverdale English Version* (1535), “Prologue to the Reader.”

low these simple principles, which have been termed by some as the “Golden Rules of Bible Study.” When studying any passage we must ask ourselves some basic questions:

Who is doing the speaking?

To whom is it being spoken?

About what is it being spoken?

When was it spoken?

What is the context in which it was spoken?

Many are very careless in their approach to and use of the Scriptures. They just open up their Bibles anywhere and expect what they read to be directed toward them – that God will speak specifically to them there.

We must remember that while *all* of the Bible was written *for* us, it was not *all* written *to* us, nor was it *all* written *about* us. Thus, the Bible *must* be divided; and not *just* divided, but *RIGHTLY* divided. That is, we are to look for the many dividing marks (or distinctions) that God Himself has placed within Scripture. We must learn to make a difference where God makes a difference! This is even true concerning Paul’s epistles.

In Romans 15:8 we learn that during Jesus Christ’s earthly ministry He,

Was a minister of the circumcision, to confirm the promises made to the fathers.

The details and circumstances of the “*Lord’s Supper*” are of the “*minister of the circumcision*” (Jesus Christ) “*confirming the promises*” (to the Nation of Israel). Paul received a revelation of this event so that he may correct the error at Corinth.

THE PASSOVER

This “*Supper*” was clearly connected with the Jewish Passover (Matthew 26:2; 17-19; Mark 14:1, 12, 14, 16; Luke 22:1, 7-8, 11, 13, 15; John 6:4; 11:55; 12:1; 13:1; 18:28, 39; 19:14).

Thus, being connected with the Passover, this “*Supper*” was clearly connected with the Old Testament (Exodus 12; 13).

This “*Supper*” was also clearly connected with the New Covenant made with Israel (Jeremiah 31:31; Hebrews 8; Ephesians 2:12; Romans 9:4). As Jesus ate the Passover with His disciples, He transferred the significance of the Passover wine from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant.

This is My blood of the New Covenant (Matthew 26:28).

This is My blood of the New Covenant (Mark 14:24).

This cup is the New Covenant in My blood (Luke 22:20).

Who can claim the “*cup of the new covenant*” today? No one! Our portion today is to be “*blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ*” (Ephesians 1:3).⁶

The change of the Passover was in the “*remembrance*.” The Old Covenant Passover was a “*memorial*” (Exodus 12:14; 13:9) of Israel’s deliverance through the Passover *lamb – the type*; while the New Covenant Passover was a “*remembrance*” (Luke 22:19, “*this do in remembrance of me*”) of Israel’s Passover *Lamb – the anti-type*.

If the Lord’s Supper is a memorial feast of the New Covenant, how can they whose blessings belong to a parenthetical dispensation introduced upon the defection of Israel, partake, without disloyalty?⁷

Israel’s Earthly Kingdom

This “*Supper*” clearly was connected with the coming “*kingdom*” in Israel.

I appoint to you a kingdom, as My Father has appointed Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Luke 22:29-30).

I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom (Matthew 26:29).

Israel’s Gifts

This “*Supper*” was connected with supernatural gifts.

Every one of these Corinthian believers who assembled to partake of the Lord’s Supper had some spiritual gift. It was not that a few had gifts, but “*every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation*” (I Corinthians 14:26). ... These supernatural gifts were ... in harmony with all that we have seen relative to the Lord’s Supper. ... Evidential spiritual gifts, the Lord’s Supper, the Covenants, all went with the earthly kingdom teaching. ... If we are right to introduce, upon our own initiative, the Lord’s Supper into this present dispensation, why not spiritual gifts, tongues, miracles? Why not be thorough?⁸

WHY CORINTH PRACTICED THE “LORD’S SUPPER”

The problem at Corinth was that they were “*not discerning the Lord’s Body*” (:29). We do not have a ritual Body of Christ. For us there is only one Body of Christ (Ephesians 4:4)! *We are the Body!*

6. E. Stevens, *The Lord’s Passover Supper and the New Covenant: For Whom? And Why?* Riverside CA.

7. Charles H. Welch, *Op. Cit.*

8. Charles H. Welch, *Ibid.*

Unfinished Correction Concerning the “*Lord’s Supper*”

Paul did not finish the issue of the “*Lord’s Supper*” with the Corinthians, for he said he would set the rest in order when he came (:34). Paul never deals with this again in Scripture. Have members of the Body of Christ been left hanging on this issue? Where are the specific instructions concerning this “*Supper*”? The Passover answers these questions! The Last Supper of our Lord as recorded in the Gospel accounts is Israel’s perpetual feast with a new emphasis! Instead of now looking back at Egypt’s Passover, Israel now, with the remembrance of Calvary, is to look forward to their coming earthly kingdom.

Shadow or Substance?

Fellow-believer, if you died with Christ, why are you subject to ordinances? What place can these have on resurrection ground? During a period of types, shadows, parables, and symbols, water, wine, could set forth clearly the blessed teaching of the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord. The picture book is fitting in the hand of a child; it is not a seemly manual for the full-grown man.⁹

Ordinances, Divine and Human

Divine ordinances (*e.g.* circumcision, etc.) have received their fulfillment in Christ. Our circumcision is “*made without hands.*” Human ordinances, such as “*touch not, taste not, handle not,*” and all of the multifarious rules and regulations of religion, have no power over one who has died with Christ. The ordinances of baptism, and of the Lord’s Supper, while directly connected with faith, were so directly associated with the flesh, and things seen, in a marked manner. The believer, who has entered into the fullness of the gospel as proclaimed in Ephesians, wherein he sees that he has been quickened, raised from the grave of sin, and seated with Christ in the heavenlies, will not need reminders every week. ...

Let not our faith stand in the wisdom of men; let none give up the Lord’s Supper merely because someone has said that it is undispensational. Search and see, then act according to the teaching of the Word.

We have no commission to “strive.” With meekness and gentleness we seek to teach the truth as far as we see it. We seek grace to be patient, to bear up under evil, in meekness instructing those who oppose themselves, peradventure God will give them a change of mind unto the knowledge of the truth (II Timothy 2:25).

We can no more have two baptisms, if the Lord says to us in the sevenfold unity of the Spirit that there is but one. We can no more observe “Days” or “Sabbaths”; we can no more observe the Feast of Unleaven Bread, the Day of Atonement, the Passover, the Feast of Weeks or Pentecost, for all these things have passed away. So also the Lord’s Supper. Instituted to look back (as the Passover looked forward) to the One who shed the blood of the New Covenant, it has its place in the dispensation of the earthly kingdom. The Lord’s Supper is to the New Covenant what the Passover Feast was to the Jew under the Old Covenant. ...

9. Charles H. Welch, *Ibid.*

Those who have been blessed with all spiritual blessings in the heavenlies in Christ, who died with Christ, and who have been raised and seated together with Him, whose hopes are not linked with a renewed earth, but with a new heaven, whose citizenship is not in the new Jerusalem which “*comes down out of heaven*,” but is in heaven itself, whose destiny is not to sit upon thrones, judging Israel or the nations, but to show in the ages to come, upon principalities and powers in the heavenlies, the Lord’s wonderful grace to them, these will find Christ to be their all, without aid of type or symbol.¹⁰

There are no scriptural instructions or commands for the Body of Christ to participate in any ordinances or rituals, including the “*Lord’s Supper*.” We are not subject to ordinances. The dispensation of Grace has NO rites, rituals or religious ceremonies. None! We are complete in Christ (Colossians 2:9-3:4).

10. Charles H. Welch, *Ibid*.

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