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Practical Essays on the Lord's Supper

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Preface

Before his death, the Lord Jesus asked his people to remember him in a simple meal of bread and a cup. Almost every group that calls itself Christian observes some ceremony in fulfillment of this request. Yet these ceremonies often differ widely from the Lord's Supper as the New Testament portrays it. These essays are for believers who would like to recover the practice of the first century church.

Chapter 1 provides a basic description of the significance of the Lord's Supper. The other essays focus on two basic practical principles about the Supper that modern Christians have mostly lost.

- Chapters 2, 3, and 4 discuss the *participants* at the Supper: those who share in the Supper should know one another to be believers.
- Chapters 5, 6, and 7 discuss the *program* at the Supper: more than one brother should lead the worship of the group.

There is a third important guideline, concerning the *frequency* of the Supper. Believers in the first century meet weekly (Acts 20:7) or even daily (Acts 2:46) to remember the Lord. There is no biblical precedent for the longer periods of a month, three months, or even a year that some groups wait between observances of the Supper. It seems superfluous to devote separate chapters to this guideline, though. The practice of the early church seems clear, and there are no practical difficulties in the path of those who would like to follow this aspect of the New Testament pattern.

I have tried to keep the discussion accessible to believers without technical training in biblical studies. In particular,

- I do not assemble long lists of scholars who oppose my positions, and labor to refute them. In my experience, such discussions distract many readers. Those who are acquainted with the academic literature can detect views to which I am reacting. My intended readers would not become experts on the scholarly arguments even if I were to catalog them.
- Scripture quotations are my own translation, from the Massoretic text of the Old Testament and the majority text (in the edition of Hodges and Farstad) of the New Testament. I have remained close to the Authorized Version to help readers recognize familiar passages, and in particular to retain the valuable distinction in the second person pronouns between singular ("thee, thou, thy") and plural ("ye, you, your"). Readers with extra academic equipment can trace the technical basis for my positions more closely by comparing my renderings with the traditional translations and with the Greek and Hebrew.
- These essays should motivate as well as educate. I often recommend particular courses of action, to show that the patterns of the first century are viable today. These recommendations are not exclusive. There may be other ways that a group of Christians could implement the New Testament practice today. The important point is not adherence to my suggestions, but prayerful study of the underlying patterns and patient attention to the Lord's direction in each church's individual situation.

As our Lord institutes the Supper, he faces Calvary through an open door. He has been approaching it for thirty-three years, but now it stares him in the face. He knows what lies ahead: Judas will betray him, the disciples will desert him, Peter will deny him, the priests will curse him, the soldiers will mock him, rough spikes will tear his flesh, and in the end even God will forsake him. Confronted with this suffering, he has two desires.

He expresses his first desire in Luke 22:15, "I have greatly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer." The first Supper is not only for the disciples. It is for the Lord. He "greatly desires" it. As he goes to the cross, he wants them to appreciate what he is doing for them. He wants to explain, through the symbolism of the Passover, the offering that he will make. Tomorrow, he will suffer alone for them. Tonight, he wants their support. How wonderful it would be if just one of them would say, "Thank you, Lord. I understand that you are bearing my sins to the tree. I cannot even imagine what you are going through, but I know you're doing it for me, and I want you to know that I'm grateful." What a bright star that would be in those dark hours! But the disciples, like Job's friends, are miserable comforters. They strive with one another for carnal preeminence, fall asleep in the garden, flee in fear before his captors, and even in the face of the resurrection, prove themselves "fools and slow of heart to believe."

Our Lord wants the Twelve to look forward with him to his sacrifice. In that he is disappointed. He has another desire, though: "This do, in remembrance of me" (1 Cor. 11:24,25). Repeat the feast, and thus look back in worship and gratitude to the finished work. He asks for none of the accolades that modern culture heaps on its heroes. But he does ask for one thing: a simple memorial meal, to let him know that we realize what he did for us, and are thankful. Faced with his request, and driven by gratitude, we ought to search out diligently from his word how to perform it, and then let his Spirit exercise our hearts in obedient praise.

Oh come, let us adore him.

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Chapter 1

What is the Lord's Supper?

The night before his crucifixion, the Lord Jesus shares a meal with his disciples. It is a holiday meal, commemorating the time when God delivered Israel from captivity in Egypt over a thousand years before. Every year these men "keep the feast," often with their own families, perhaps sometimes with one another. This time is different. The Lord turns his disciples' minds from the past to the near future. He shifts the emphasis of the meal from Israel's exodus to his own crucifixion. Then he tells them to repeat two elements of the meal, as his special memorials.

The Lord's Supper is the church's obedience to her Lord's request. Yet many do not understand why he urges his followers to observe it, or what it means. In this chapter, we explore the meaning of this simple ceremony.

- We learn the significance of its origins in Israel's **Passover** meal.
- The Passover is only one of several instances in the Bible when people both offer a sacrifice to God and also eat of it themselves. We study the meaning of such **shared sacrifices**.
- Then we examine the role of the Supper as a **symbol** and its relation to the underlying reality.

1.1. Christ our Passover

The Lord institutes the Last Supper at a Passover dinner. Only the first three gospels record the meal, and all three confirm that it is the Passover (Matt. 26:17-20; Mark 14:12-17; Luke 22:7-14). In Luke 22:15, the Lord tells the disciples, "I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer."

Exodus 12 describes the origins of the Passover during Israel's captivity in Egypt. To persuade Pharaoh to release them, God will kill every firstborn child in all the land of Egypt (12:12). He tells the Israelites that they will be spared this judgment, if they sacrifice a lamb and mark their doorways with its blood (12:13, 23). They eat the flesh of the lamb that night (12:8,9), and are freed from Egypt so rapidly that they must eat unleavened bread (12:34, 39). The Passover sacrifice and the feast of unleavened bread are a continual reminder to the nation of their delivery from Egypt.

The Passover is a rich source of images to describe God's delivering his people. When the Lord draws our attention to his body and blood, one of those images jumps into the foreground. At the center of the Passover is the sacrificial lamb. Its blood protects God's people from judgment. Its flesh nourishes them for their journey to freedom. In the Supper, the Lord identifies himself with that sacrifice.

The parallel between the Lord Jesus and the Passover lamb surfaces repeatedly in the New Testament.

- Paul writes, "For our Passover is sacrificed for us, even Christ. Therefore let us keep the feast" (1 Cor. 5:7,8).
- John suggests that Christ was slain at the same time that the Passover lambs were being killed in the temple (19:14),¹ and explains that the soldiers did not break the Lord's legs so that he could fulfill the requirement placed on the Passover lamb that none of its bones be broken (19:36; Exod. 12:46; Num. 9:12).
- Peter describes Christ as "a lamb unblemished and unspotted" (1 Pet. 1:19), recalling the requirement that the Passover lamb be "perfect" (Exod. 12:5). A few verses earlier he exhorts his readers to "gird up the loins of their mind" (1:13), even as Israel ate the original Passover with their "loins girded" (Exod. 12:11).

¹For the details, and the interesting difference between the dates of the Passover in John and in the Synoptics, see Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1971) 774-786.

- The frequent references throughout the Revelation to Christ as a sacrificial lamb (for example, 5:6, 12; 12:11) may also reflect the Passover.

This imagery helps us understand why the Lord chooses elements of the Passover as his special memorial. For the New Testament singles out his sacrificial death as particularly important. Paul summarizes the gospel as the death and resurrection of the Lord for his people (1 Cor. 15:1-5). The entire book of Hebrews compares Christ's ministry to Israel's sacrificial worship. As the Lord approaches his death, he acknowledges that it is his central mission: "Now is my soul troubled, and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour?" But for this cause am I come unto this hour" (John 12:27).

The Lord Jesus is his people's sacrifice, dying for their sins, rising for their justification. Whatever else they remember about him, this they must not forget. His choice of a memorial reflects the importance of that sacrifice. He selects a Jewish feast rich with pictures of deliverance, to remind them that he is freeing them from bondage to sin. Then he asks them to share the cup and the bread, emblems of his suffering, to focus their attention on the sacrifice that makes their salvation possible.

1.2. Eating a Sacrifice

When we trace the roots of the Lord's Supper to the Jewish Passover, it focuses our attention on the Savior's passion, and on his role as a sacrifice. At first glance, it seems a strange sacrifice. A sacrifice is supposed to be a present from people to God. Yet the people eat this sacrifice. The Supper pictures believers' eating and drinking the body and blood of the Lord, their sacrifice for sin.

The Supper is not the only time when the Lord speaks of believers' eating his flesh and drinking his blood. In John 6 he announces, "I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. And the bread that I shall give is my flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world" (John 6:51).

The Jews find this surprising and say, "How can this one give us flesh to eat?" (verse 52).

The Lord responds, "Truly, truly, I say to you, if you do not eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you do not have life in yourselves. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will resurrect him in the last day. For my flesh is truly food, and my blood is truly drink. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him. As the living Father sent me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats me, that one shall live because of me" (verses 53-57).

The Jews are puzzled when the Lord tells them to eat his flesh and drink his blood. The answer to the riddle lies in their own customs. It is not uncommon for Israelites to eat part of the sacrifices that they offer to God.

- As we have seen, the Israelites eat the Passover lamb, which is a sacrifice (Exod. 12:27).
- When someone brings a sin offering or a trespass offering, the meat belongs to the officiating priest (Lev. 6:26; 7:7), and every male priest shares in eating it (Lev. 6:29; 7:6).
- The peace offerings are also eaten (Lev. 7:15-21). Unlike the sin offering and the trespass offering, the peace offering is not restricted to the priests. Instead, "every clean person shall eat the flesh" (Lev. 7:19). We may have an example of eating the peace offerings in 1 Kings 3:15: "Solomon ... offered up burnt offerings and made peace offerings, and held a feast for all his servants."

Paul explains what it means to eat a sacrifice in 1 Cor. 10:18: "Are not those who eat the sacrifices in fellowship with the altar?" One who eats a sacrifice shares in the worship that it represents. We can trace this principle in each of the sacrifices that people eat in the Old Testament.

- Only the priests can eat the sin and trespass offerings, because only they and the one bringing the sacrifice are involved in the transaction. The worshipper brings the sacrifice to seek forgiveness. The priests, as God's representatives, take the sin from the offender and bear it themselves. Eating the sacrifice shows their participation in this transaction. When Eleazar and Ithamar fail to eat the sin offering, Moses rebukes them: "Why have you not eaten the sin offering in the holy place? For it is

most holy, and God has given it to you to bear the iniquity of the congregation, to make atonement for them before the Lord" (Lev. 10:17).

- People bring peace offerings, not to remedy their sin, but to offer thanksgiving and praise to God. Anyone can participate in such worship--anyone who is not out of fellowship with God because of sin or ceremonial uncleanness. So the law allows any clean person to join in the thanksgiving by eating the sacrifice.
- At the Exodus, the blood of the Passover lamb protects a home and those in it from God's judgment. Everyone in the house seeks refuge through that blood, and it is fitting that all of them eat the sacrifice that expresses their trust in God for deliverance.

In this light, we can understand what it means for people to eat the sacrificial lamb of the new covenant, the Lord Jesus. To eat the sacrifice is to join in the worship that it represents. Christ's sacrifice bears the sin of his people, and offers forgiveness and fellowship with God. Those who eat of the sacrifice acknowledge that their sin has been borne, and accept the forgiveness that it offers.

The transaction is a mirror image of the ritual for the sin and trespass offerings in the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, a sinful worshipper confesses his sin and seeks forgiveness by offering the sacrifice, and a ritually sinless priest bears the sin by eating the sacrifice. In the New Testament, the sinless priest bears the sin by offering the sacrifice, and the sinful worshipper claims a part in that salvation by eating the sacrifice. In both cases, the single sacrifice binds together the sinner and the sin bearer. One participates by offering the sacrifice, the other by eating it.

Thus the Lord can insist in John 6 that only those who partake of him have life. For only by claiming his sacrifice as our own can we enjoy forgiveness of sin.

In the Old Testament, people share in worship by eating the sacrifices. This custom explains the symbolism of the Lord's Supper and John 6, except for one point. Under the law of Moses, people could never drink blood, whether of a sacrifice or of an animal slain for food (Lev. 17:10,12,14). The Lord Jesus describes believers as both eating his flesh and drinking his blood.

The difference emphasizes how much the new order surpasses the old. There was a limit to how far people might participate in sacrificial worship in Israel. The law about eating blood showed that they could not fully share in the transaction symbolized by the offering. Under the New Covenant, God's people enjoy complete forgiveness of sin and unhindered fellowship with him. The benefits of Christ's sacrifice are available without restriction or limitation, so their participation can be described as drinking his blood as well as eating his flesh.

1.3. Symbol and Reality

In John 6, the Lord teaches that salvation comes by eating his flesh and drinking his blood. At the Lord's Supper, we eat bread of which the Lord has said, "This is my body," and drink a cup of which the Lord has said, "This is my blood" (Matt. 26:26-28). The language on the two occasions is so similar that we find John 6 helpful in understanding the Supper.

In spite of this similarity, the passages are not describing exactly the same event. We are not saved by partaking of the Lord's Supper. The eating and drinking described in John 6 take place when we trust in the Lord for salvation. The Supper is a symbol, a picture, of that initial meal.

In John 6, the Lord himself tells us what it means to eat his flesh and drink his blood. We need only compare John 6:40 with John 6:54.

John 6:40	John 6:54
Every one who sees the Son and believes on him	He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood
has eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day.	has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.

Both verses describe the same result: receiving eternal life and the promise of resurrection. In 6:54, the condition for this happy result is eating Christ's flesh and drinking his blood. In 6:40, the same result comes

from seeing him and believing on him. The natural conclusion is that the language about eating and drinking in 6:54 is a metaphor for the reality of personal faith described in 6:40.

In the law, there is more to a sacrifice than offering it. Not until the priest eats it and bears the sin is the work complete. The Lord's language suggests that the same principle holds for his sacrifice. The death of Christ is only part of the transaction. The sinner must enter into the transaction, just as the priest does in the Old Testament. The way of joining the old transaction, eating, becomes a metaphor for the way of joining the new transaction, faith.

John 6 thus uses the sacrificial customs of the Old Testament to describe the sacrifice of Christ and our need to receive him by faith. In the Lord's Supper we draw a picture of that reception, by acting out the eating and drinking that represent faith. By sharing in the Supper, each of us is saying, "I have eaten of Christ by believing on him." An unbeliever who partakes at the Supper portrays a lie, drawing a picture without the underlying reality, and Paul warns against this error by instructing those who come to the table to examine themselves (1 Cor. 11:28). The Supper reminds us regularly of our Lord's sacrifice for us and our faith in him.

The Supper is a symbolic reenactment of a past spiritual event. So is the Passover celebration from which it is drawn. The bitter herbs (Exod. 12:8) recall Egypt's bitter bondage. The unleavened bread recalls her urgent departure, when her kneading troughs were already packed and there was no time to wait for bread to rise (Exod. 12:34,39). The lamb recalls the blood sacrifice that protected the slaves from the death of the firstborn. Like Israel from Egypt, believers make their exodus from the power of darkness only once, when they receive Christ. Like the Passover, the Lord's Supper is a repeated commemoration of a singular event.

1.4. Review Questions

1. What element of the Passover celebration provides the main symbolism of the Lord's Supper?
2. John 6 speaks of eating the Lord's flesh and drinking his blood. What is the source of this imagery?
3. What does it mean to eat a sacrifice?
4. Please discuss the different roles that the blood plays in John 6 and in the Law, and the reason for this difference.
5. In the light of John 6, please discuss whether the Lord's Supper causes salvation or symbolizes it.

Chapter 2

The Guests at the Table

Modern dining ranges from McDonald's Hamburgers to Thanksgiving dinner at Grandmother's house.

On the one hand, the fast-food outlet churns out servings for all comers. We hope for a short line, pay the fee, and then retreat with our meal to a private booth or to our car. The system inconveniences us as little as possible with other people. The food is pre-cooked so we don't have to wait for the chef. The cash register is computerized so we don't have to wait for the cashier. The place runs like an assembly line so we don't have to wait for other customers. We go there to fill our stomachs, with as little interference from others as possible.

On the other hand, food is only part of the delight at a family Thanksgiving table. We come there to renew and strengthen cherished ties. Our love for one another and happy family news blend with the aroma of the meal. The others at the table are not strangers, but friends, who add to our joy. If there are people there whom we do not know, they are the guests of someone we do know and love, and we welcome them into the warmth of the family.

Thanksgiving has something that the fast-food restaurant does not. We call that extra something "table unity." Table unity is the principle that to eat together is to belong together, and to belong together is to eat together. It reminds us that dining ought to feed the soul as well as the stomach, and that a successful dinner requires good friends as well as good food.

In this chapter, we discuss table unity in general, and its importance at the breaking of bread.

- First we gather several biblical examples of table unity.
- Then we see why the the Lord's Supper should be characterized by table unity.
- Finally, we see how the concept of table unity explains some episodes in the New Testament.

In the next chapter, we study some ways to encourage table unity at the Supper.

2.1. Great Meals in the Bible

Meals in the Bible illustrate that those who eat together belong together, and those who belong together eat together.

- Meals express love and friendship.
- They seal formal agreements.
- In Israel's religion, they bring the people together to worship God.

2.1.1. Meals of Love and Friendship

In modern western culture, we have various gestures to show love and friendship for one another. If we are at a loss to communicate our affection, those who sell flowers, candy, and greeting cards stand ready to advise us. In the Bible, one of the strongest gestures of friendship is to eat with someone.

Few friendships are as strong and as touching as that between Jonathan, the crown prince of Israel, and David, the shepherd boy who became king instead. Their love for one another welded them almost into a single person. "The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul" (1 Sam. 18:1). Jonathan protected and sheltered David while David was still a fugitive, pursued by Jonathan's insanely jealous father, King Saul. Both Jonathan and David knew that David would one day be king. David must often have thought of how he, as king, would repay Jonathan's kindness. David never had the chance. By the time David took the throne, Jonathan was dead.

David wanted to say "Thank you," but his faithful friend was gone. He asked his servants, "Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may show him kindness for Jonathan's sake?" (2 Sam. 9:1) They found Jonathan's son Mephibosheth, a cripple.

Mephibosheth must have feared for his life when David summoned him, for it was customary for new kings to execute all family members of the previous dynasty to guard against rebellions. David's words quickly

comforted Mephibosheth. "Fear not, for I will surely show thee kindness for Jonathan thy father's sake, and will restore thee all the land of Saul thy father; and thou shalt eat bread at my table continually" (2 Sam. 9:7). Then David charged Ziba, one of Saul's old servants, to look after Mephibosheth's affairs: "Thou therefore, and thy sons, and thy servants, shall till the land for him, and thou shalt bring in the fruits, that thy master's son may have food to eat, but Mephibosheth thy master's son shall eat bread alway at my table. ... As for Mephibosheth, he shall eat at my table, as one of the king's sons" (2 Sam. 9:11). As the historian concludes this touching episode, he notes, "So Mephibosheth dwelt in Jerusalem, for he ate continually at the king's table" (2 Sam. 9:13).

David was kind to Mephibosheth in several ways. He spared his life, and restored his father's lands to him. The greatest token of David's kindness is the invitation to dine at David's table. The story shows that this is a great privilege by mentioning it three times. The privilege is not in the food that Mephibosheth receives at the table. His food comes from his own fields, managed by Ziba and his sons. It is the place at David's table, the association with him in dining, that shows how greatly David favors Mephibosheth. Years later, when Mephibosheth recalls David's friendship, this is the detail he remembers. "For all of my father's house were but dead men before my lord the king, yet didst thou set thy servant among them that did eat at thine own table" (2 Sam. 19:28).

It is a mark of love and friendship for two people to dine together. Similarly, it is natural to assume that those who dine together are friends. David describes the most deceitful treachery conceivable when he writes, "Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, who did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me" (Ps. 41:9). Dining together is a mark of close friendship and mutual trust. It would be unthinkable for us to turn against someone whose hospitality we have enjoyed. The Fourth Gospel quotes part of this verse to describe the treachery of Judas Iscariot against the Lord Jesus (John 13:18).

2.1.2. Meals that Seal Covenants

The Bible frequently describes covenants among people, or between people and God. A covenant is a solemn, formal, legal agreement, something like a contract, but with subtle differences. A modern contract expresses the most we can hope for from a relationship. The existence of a contract makes a relationship more formal and less cordial than it might be otherwise. A covenant expresses a much deeper commitment. It is a way of announcing and strengthening a friendship.

People who establish covenants in the Old Testament often eat together as part of the ceremony. This is natural, since shared meals express love and friendship, and since covenants are formalized friendships.

For instance, Genesis 26 records repeated strife between Isaac's herdsmen and those who live in Gerar, the capital of Abimelech, king of the Philistines. Earlier, Isaac offended Abimelech by pretending that his wife Rebekah was only his sister. Isaac naturally concludes that the Philistine herdsmen reflect the anger of their king. When Isaac sees Abimelech and two of his associates approaching his camp, he is suspicious: "Why are you coming to me, since you hate me?" (Gen. 26:27)

Abimelech is coming to say that he does not hate Isaac. On the contrary, he wants to make a covenant with Isaac to show their mutual goodwill: "We saw certainly that the Lord was with thee, and we said, "Let there be now an oath between us, even between us and thee, and let us make a covenant with thee, that thou wilt do us no hurt, as we have not touched thee, and as we have done unto thee nothing but good" (Gen. 26:28-29).

Isaac accepts their pledge of friendship by serving them a meal: "[Isaac] made them a feast, and they ate and drank. And they rose up early in the morning, and swore one to another, and Isaac sent them away, and they departed from him in peace" (Gen. 26:30,31). A shared meal demonstrates their neighborliness.

In 2 Samuel 3, a meal seals a covenant between David and a former enemy. Abner was the general of Saul's army. After Saul's death he served Ishbosheth, Saul's son who was David's rival for the throne. In this position, Abner was David's mortal enemy. Yet, after a quarrel with Ishbosheth, he throws his weight behind David, and sends David this offer: "Make thy covenant with me, and behold, my hand shall be with thee, to bring about all Israel unto thee" (2 Sam. 3:12).

David agrees, so Abner persuades the elders of Israel and Benjamin to follow David, and then goes to tell David of his new subjects. For years, David and Abner have been enemies. Abner must wonder whether David will deal honestly with him, or whether David will treat him as a political enemy because of his past allegiance to Saul and to Saul's son. David quickly lays his fears to rest. The gesture by which David assures Abner of his friendship is a shared meal: "David made a feast for Abner and the men that were with him" (2 Sam. 3:20).

God uses the symbol of a shared meal when he enters into covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai. Exodus 24 describes the ceremonies at the ratification of the Sinaitic Covenant. Hebrews 9:18-22a identifies these as the official covenant ceremonies. After Moses builds an altar and offers sacrifices, and after the people formally agree to keep the covenant law, representatives of the nation enter into God's presence. "Then Moses, and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel. ... And upon the nobles of the children of Israel he laid not his hand. Also they saw God, and ate and drank" (Exod. 24:9-11).

They eat and drink in God's presence, as they would with a human with whom they might make a covenant. The meal shows the union of those who eat together.

2.1.3. A Meal of Redemption

God commands Israel to hold a feast each year remembering how he brought them out of bondage in Egypt. He tells them in detail who may share in the feast and who may not.

"This is the ordinance of the Passover. No stranger shall eat of it. But every man's servant that is bought for money, when thou hast circumcised him, then shall he eat of it. A foreigner or a hired servant shall not eat of it. ... All the congregation of Israel shall observe it. And when a stranger shall sojourn with thee, and will observe the Passover to the Lord, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and observe it, and he shall be as one that is born in the land, for no uncircumcised person shall eat of it" (Exod. 12:43-49).

"But the man who ... refrains from observing the Passover, even the same soul shall be cut off from among his people. Because he brought not the offering of the Lord in his appointed season, that man shall bear his sin" (Num. 9:13).

These instructions divide the people into two groups.

- The Israelites, and the slaves they have purchased and circumcised, **must** keep the Passover feast. It is sin not to remember the Lord's redemption. All who belong together must eat together.
- Uncircumcised people, including strangers and hired servants, **must not** eat of the Passover feast. They do not belong to the redeemed nation, and cannot participate, for all who eat together must belong together.

Israel is a single nation, bound together by its redemption from Egypt. The shared meal, throughout the Old Testament, is a symbol of unity and commitment. The Passover meal applies the symbol of the shared meal to the reality of Israel's spiritual unity. Thus the Passover law insists that all and only those who are truly one should portray that unity by partaking of the meal.

Meals in the Old Testament are like family feasts, not fast-food restaurants. They feed not only the body but also the soul, by proclaiming that those who share in them belong together. Because of this deeper meaning, it matters who takes part in them. Those who share the unity that the meal proclaims should not be absent. Those who do not share that unity should not be present.

2.2. Table Unity at the Lord's Supper

Shared meals in the Old Testament reflect love and friendship, commitment to covenant, and spiritual oneness. The Lord's Supper should be characterized by all of these.

The Lord's Supper commemorates the *love* of Christ for his people, and the love that they have for one another. At the first supper the Lord Jesus gave his followers his "new commandment": "A new commandment I give unto you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one

another. By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another" (John 13:34,35). This theme is so prominent in the Supper that before the end of the first century it was sometimes called a "feast of love" (Jude 12).

The Lord's Supper commemorates the *new covenant*, under which believers today live. The death of Christ is the sacrifice that ratifies that covenant, a theme developed at length in Hebrews 9. When the Lord Jesus inaugurated the Supper, he presented the cup as "the new covenant in my blood" (1 Cor. 11:25) or "my blood of the new covenant" (Matt. 26:28). Whenever believers recall these words, they recognize that the breaking of bread symbolizes their participation in the new covenant.

The Lord's Supper has much in common with the *Passover* meal. According to Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the first Supper was a Passover meal. Paul sees the Passover as symbolic of Christ, when he teaches, "Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us" (1 Cor. 5:7).

- As Israel celebrated redemption from Egypt at the Passover, so the believer today remembers redemption from sin in the Supper.
- Israel's Passover was for all and only those who enjoyed the redemption it symbolized. In the same way, the Lord's Supper is for all those, and only those, who are redeemed by Jesus Christ.

In many modern churches, those who share in the Lord's Supper may not know one another. A total stranger can walk in off the street and partake without causing any surprise. This custom fits well with McDonald's, but very poorly with the New Testament. The Lord's Supper in the New Testament is a family feast, an expression of table unity. We should celebrate it in such a way that those who eat together belong together, and those who do not belong together, do not eat together.

2.3. Table Unity in the New Testament

Old Testament examples show that sharing a meal is a symbol of unity. The Lord's Supper is similar to many of those meals, so we conclude that those who eat it together ought to share in the union that it symbolizes.

Examples of the Supper in the New Testament support this conclusion. In 1 Corinthians, Paul deals with two problems at the Lord's Supper. The nature of the problems, and his proposed solutions, show that the Lord's Supper is indeed closer to a family Thanksgiving meal than to lunch at McDonald's. His instructions also suggest ways that we can encourage table unity when we gather for the Supper.

2.3.1. The Church's Duty to Exclude, 1 Corinthians 5

1 Corinthians 5 gives valuable instruction on how the church should discipline a member who sins. Paul rebukes the church at Corinth for tolerating sin in their midst. With his apostolic authority, he delivers the offender to Satan (5:3-5), and then calls on the church to judge him and put him away (5:6-13).

When Paul tells the church to put the offender out, he first speaks in a metaphor (5:6-8) and then directly (5:9-13). In the metaphor, he compares the church at the Lord's Supper to Israel gathered at the Passover, and urges them to "purge out ... the old leaven" (5:7) so that they can "keep the feast" (5:8) in purity. Speaking more literally, he commands them, "with such a one [you are] not to eat" (5:11). They should exclude the offender when they eat together. The Lord's Supper is one of the meals that they share. Probably, it is the main one that Paul has in mind here.

These instructions show that the church has a duty to know who is at the table. It is not enough for each person to decide for himself whether or not to partake. Paul expects the Corinthians to recognize who is there, and to be sure that the sinner does not share in the meal.

It is love, not rudeness, that requires the church to make such decisions. At McDonald's, we do not know the other diners, and we usually do not take the time to meet them. At our family supper tables, though, we expect to know those with whom we eat. It is hypocrisy to eat a meal of love and unity with people whom we do not even know.

2.3.2. The Church's Duty to Include, 1 Corinthians 11

The church in Corinth failed to exclude those who did not belong at the Supper. It also failed to include those who did belong there. The second half of 1 Corinthians 11 describes an observance of the Lord's Supper so perverted that it is not worthy of the name. "When you come together therefore into one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating, every one takes first his own supper, and one is hungry, and another is drunken. What? Don't you have houses for eating and drinking? Or do you despise the church of God, and put to shame those who have not?" (1 Cor. 11:20-22)

Paul's references to hunger and drunkenness suggest that the Corinthians hold the Lord's Supper as part of a full meal. Originally, that meal probably met a practical need. It was one way that wealthy believers could share with poorer ones, "those who have not" (verse 22).

The Corinthian church is not a rich church. Paul reminds them in the first chapter, "For you perceive your calling, brethren, that not many wise people (by fleshly standards), not many powerful people, not many high-class people, are called" (1:26). Many of them spar constantly with poverty. The meal is an excellent opportunity for those who have to share with those who have not.

Unhappily, one group ignores another at the supper. Perhaps we are seeing the same kind of division along class lines that James rebukes in his epistle (James 2:1-7). Paul describes the problem this way: "For first of all, when you come together in church, I hear that divisions persist among you, and I partly believe it. For there must be cliques among you, so that those who are approved may become manifest among you" (1 Cor. 11:18-19).

We can imagine the rich people as they rush to the main table, and sample one another's delicate food. They do not notice that the poorer believers, perhaps slaves detained by their masters, are not there yet. By the time the latecomers arrive, the food is gone.

Paul's closing admonition puts the matter in a nutshell: "When you come together to eat, wait for one another" (11:33). They should not come to the Supper as individuals, but as members of a body. They should wait for one another. To do that, they must know one another. And if they wait for one another, and someone who should be there does not appear, Christian love will lead them to inquire after the absent one and give whatever help is needed.

The church includes, as well as excludes, because of love. We would not be surprised to find family members missing from McDonald's when we drop in for a quick bite on a shopping trip. At our family supper tables, we quickly notice loved ones who are missing. Similarly, the church should see to it that those who do belong at the Lord's Supper are present or accounted for.

2.4. Review Questions

1. Give an example of a meal in the Bible that expresses love and friendship.
2. What is a covenant? How does it differ from a contract?
3. What role do meals play in establishing covenants?
4. What two principles governed participation in Israel's Passover meal?
5. How is the Lord's Supper like an Old Testament meal of friendship? How is it like a covenant meal? A Passover meal?
6. Should the church monitor who participates in the Lord's Supper and who does not? Support your answer with biblical examples.
7. Illustrate the church's duty at the Supper by describing what would happen if there were somebody missing at your family's supper table, or if there were a stranger there.

Chapter 3 Dining Worthily

Imagine that you've just been invited to dine in a foreign country with the head of state. A thousand questions flood your mind. "What shall I wear?" "How should I address him?" "Do I shake hands or bow?" "Can I ever learn their table manners?" It is a great honor to be invited to such an event. To behave unworthily would embarrass the host and the other guests, not to speak of yourself.

If worthy conduct is important when dining with an earthly monarch, it is even more important when we dine with the King of Kings. In 1 Cor. 11:27-29, Paul warns the Corinthians about two unworthy approaches to the Supper. Both errors threaten the table unity that we studied in the previous chapter.

"Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, **unworthily**, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.
But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.
For he who eats and drinks **unworthily**, eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

Each of these warnings has three parts:

	1 Cor. 11:27-28	1 Cor. 11:29
The offense	"eat and drink unworthily"	"eat and drink unworthily"
The consequence	"guilty"	"judgment"
The correction	"examine"	"discern"

In this chapter, we study the third part of each warning, the one that corrects the error and tells us how to avoid the penalty.

- We learn what it is to **examine** ourselves individually,
- and to **discern** the Lord's body.

3.1. Examine Yourself

In the first warning, Paul tells his readers to examine themselves. Doctors often tell their patients to examine themselves for danger signs of diseases. The sooner a physician knows of a problem, the better are the patient's chances for recovery. Spiritual problems, too, heal faster if we find them sooner.

Two other passages in the New Testament exhort believers to examine themselves, using the same verb rendered "examine" in 1 Cor. 11:28. One of these passages, 2 Cor. 13:5, reminds us **why** we should examine ourselves. The other, Gal. 6:4, gives us more detail on **what** we should look for.

3.1.1. Why should we examine ourselves?

Both medically and spiritually, we examine ourselves to uncover hidden problems. The Greek word for "examine" recurs in 2 Cor. 13:5. There, Paul identifies the problem that a spiritual examination can detect: "Test yourselves, whether you are in the faith; **examine** yourselves." We must check that we are indeed trusting Christ for salvation.

At first glance, this admonition may seem hard to understand. After all, if I am truly born again, I have everlasting life and can never perish (John 3:16). Why then should I check periodically that I am saved?

The reason is that not all who think they are born again, really are. According to the New Testament, we prove we are truly saved by persevering in the Christian life. For example, Paul writes to the Colossians, "And you, who were once alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, has he now reconciled ..., if you continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel" (Col. 1:21-23).

The Greek construction shows that the clause "if you continue" modifies the clause "you ... has he now reconciled," and not the intervening material. In other words, "If you continue in the faith, then it is true that

he has reconciled you." We know that we were reconciled because we continue to live as believers. Those who do not "continue in the faith," but are "moved away from the hope of the gospel," have no evidence that they were ever truly born again.

The writer to the Hebrews makes the same point: "For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end" (Hebrews 3:14, compare 3:6). At any moment, we either are or are not partakers of Christ. Evidence that we are **presently** saved lies in our **future** conduct. If we fall away, we have no right to think that we ever were truly born again. If we hold fast to the end, we can be sure that our salvation is genuine. The real article lasts: "He who has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6).

Passages such as these show why we must check up on ourselves. We are not questioning God's saving work. We are questioning our own hearts, which are "deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jer. 17:9). Satan would love to lure unbelievers into thinking that they are believers. Those who are lost and know they are lost may seek salvation. Those who are lost and think they are safe, never will. Prudent Christians examine themselves regularly, to be certain that they are really regenerate. In 1 Cor. 11:28, Paul points to the Lord's Supper as a good time for self-examination.

3.1.2. How should we examine ourselves?

In Gal. 6:4, Paul tells his readers what to look for in checking themselves: "Let every one **examine** his own work." He directs their attention to their conduct.

In warning about the danger of false salvation, and in telling people to look at their works, Paul echoes the teaching of the Lord Jesus in Matt. 7:15-23. Like Paul in 2 Cor. 13:5, the Lord tells of those who seem saved but are not:

- "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves" (7:15).
- "Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter into the kingdom of heaven" (7:21).

Like Paul in Gal. 6:4, he says their works distinguish them from real believers:

- "You shall know them by their fruits" (7:16).
- "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit (7:18).
- "Wherefore by their fruits you shall know them" (7:20).
- "He who does the will of my Father [shall enter into the kingdom of heaven]" (7:21).

Our actions are an important sign of the Spirit's work in our hearts. By directing our attention to them, the scriptures urge us not to rely on our feelings, whether good or bad. Excitement and enthusiasm, sadness and discouragement, may result from many things besides our relation with God. They are not reliable barometers of spiritual health. We are to look at our conduct.

Even our conduct may deceive us if we are not careful. While telling his followers to look for fruit, the Lord warns that some actions mean more than others: "Many will say to me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?' And then will I profess unto them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you who work iniquity'" (Matt. 7:22-23). A person can show "wonderful works" and still "work iniquity." "Wonderful works" are showy acts, done so that men may see them and think well of us. "Iniquity" is disobedience to the Lord.

Many of the things God commands us to do are public deeds, and we should not neglect them. We dare not grow overconfident, though, on the basis of good works that men can see. The deeds we do before God's eyes alone are the best indicators of our spiritual health.

Paul makes the same point in slightly different words: "Let every man examine his own work, and then he shall have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another" (Gal. 6:4). To "have rejoicing ... in another" is to feel secure because we are better than someone else we know. If everyone around us is particularly sinful, we may be better than our friends and still offend God. Instead, we are to rejoice in ourselves, comparing our conduct now with our conduct a day, a month, or a year ago. We look for growth, not stature. A ten-foot statue is taller than a three-foot child, but only the child is alive and growing.

Regular medical check-ups help guarantee good physical health. Regular spiritual check-ups are a good idea, too. God wants us to come to the Supper with a clean bill of spiritual health.

3.2. Discern the Body

Even when we examine ourselves, we may still partake unworthily if we do "not discern the Lord's body" (1 Cor. 11:29). Understanding the word "discern" and the phrase "the Lord's body" helps explain the meaning of this second warning.

3.2.1. "The Lord's Body"

When we first read Paul's reference to "the Lord's body" in verse 29, we are likely to think of the memorial bread, representing Christ's "body, which is broken for" the believers (verse 24). Probably, though, the phrase "the Lord's body" in verse 29 does not refer to the bread.

Throughout this section, whenever Paul refers to the bread, he also mentions the cup. The two cannot be separated from one another. Notice how they are paired:

The Lord Jesus took bread ...(verse 23)	... and the cup (verse 25).
Believers are to "eat this bread, and drink this cup" (verse 26).
If we do not examine ourselves, we "eat this bread, and drink the cup of the Lord, unworthily,"
and are "guilty of the body and blood of the Lord" (verse 27).
When we do examine ourselves, we may "eat of the bread, and drink of the cup" (verse 28).
Even in verse 29, failure to "discern the Lord's body" means that we "eat and drink unworthily,"
and both "eat and drink judgment" to ourselves.

When Paul refers to the bread, he always refers to the cup along with it. If "the Lord's body" were a reference to the bread, Paul would probably urge his readers to discern both the Lord's body and the Lord's blood. Because he mentions only the body, and not the blood, we wonder about the meaning of "the Lord's body" in verse 29.

We do not have far to look. The next chapter, 1 Corinthians 12, uses the human body as a picture of the local church. This picture appears elsewhere in the New Testament, but 1 Corinthians 12 is the most detailed example. Paul describes believers as different members of the body of Christ. Each Christian contributes uniquely to the church, just as the foot, the eye, and the hand make their unique contributions to the body. Paul summarizes his illustration with these words: "Now you are the body of Christ, and members in particular" (1 Cor. 12:27).

Bible writers commonly join sections of their books together by using a phrase or idea characteristic of one section at the end of the preceding section. As Paul nears the end of 1 Corinthians 11, he begins to think of the picture that he will draw in the next chapter. So he refers to the church as "the Lord's body."

3.2.2. "Discern"

Paul warns of "judgment" if we do not "discern" the Lord's body. The next few verses help us understand what it means to discern the local church.

Verse 30 explains the judgment that comes from not discerning: "Because of this many among you are weak and sickly, and many sleep [in death]." Because the Corinthians fail to discern the Lord's body, God chastens many of them with sickness and even physical death. This physical chastisement is the "judgment" mentioned in verse 29.

We see this correspondence clearly in verse 31, which uses words very similar to those of verse 29 to tell how believers can avoid this suffering: "For if we **discerned** ourselves, we would not be **judged**." The same verb "discern" occurs both in verse 29 and in verse 31. The verb "judged" in verse 31 is the verbal form of the noun "judgment" in verse 29.

Verse 31 suggests that to "discern" is to examine or recognize. God must chastise people in the church because the church itself is lax in identifying the problem. If believers help one another detect and correct sin before it goes too far, there is no need for God's more severe chastisement.

Verse 34 throws further light on the process of discerning the Lord's body: "If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that you do not come together unto **judgment**." The noun "judgment" is the same as in verse 29. This time, though, the remedy is eating at home.

To see the relation between this instruction and discerning the body, recall the original problem in 1 Cor. 14:20-22. The wealthy believers are hungry for the meal that the Corinthians hold with the Lord's Supper. Instead of waiting for the poorer worshipers to arrive, they eat all the food themselves. Paul urges them to satisfy their hunger at home, so that they can wait patiently for the others, and thus avoid judgment.

In verse 34, being able to wait for others avoids judgment. In verse 29, discerning the Lord's body avoids judgment. It is reasonable to conclude that discerning the Lord's body includes waiting for others. The poor Christians are as much a part of the body as are the rich ones. The rich believers, though, are excluding the poor from the table by not waiting for them. The rich go ahead without asking, "Who else should be here? Who else is part of the body with me?" Thus they fail to discern the body.

In verse 31, we avoid judgment by knowing other Christians well enough to help them correct sin before the Lord chastens it. In verse 34, we avoid judgment by knowing who else should be at the table, and waiting for them. Both cases require us to know the others at the Lord's Supper, and act appropriately. When we know those with whom we partake, and serve them according to that knowledge, we discern the Lord's body. If we do not know them, or do not give them what we know they need, we do not discern the Lord's body, and are in line for judgment.

To "discern the Lord's body" is to know the other believers in our church, and to help them grow in their spiritual lives. We are not nameless faces to each other, people about whom we know little. We are committed to each other. We rejoice in one another's spiritual victories and share the pain of one another's defeats. We help each other keep our lives pure before the Lord.

3.3. Review Questions

1. What are two ways someone might participate unworthily at the Lord's Supper?
2. Why do believers need to examine themselves to see whether they are in the faith?
3. What errors might one make in examining one's works?
4. Ministers often make an announcement like this just before the Supper: "This is the Lord's Table, not the table of this church. If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus, we invite you to come and share in it." Please evaluate this invitation.

Chapter 4

The Theory and Practice of Discerning the Body

In the previous chapter, we saw that Paul warns the Corinthians twice about dining unworthily at the Lord's Supper. The answer to both warnings is examination--first of oneself, then of one another--before breaking bread.

- We examine **ourselves**, to determine whether we belong at the table.
- Then we examine **each other**, helping one another avoid problems that might otherwise strike unexpectedly.

The notion of discerning the spiritual condition of others offends many modern people. Our society values personal privacy and independence. Christians who hear for the first time of "discerning the body" often quote the Lord's words, "Judge not, that you be not judged" (Matt. 7:1). Even when they understand **that** they should discern the body, the idea is so new that they may not understand **how** to go about it. In this chapter,

- we survey several **other scriptures** that show the need for Christians to examine both themselves and one another.
- Then we illustrate how these principles can be **applied** with some practical examples.

4.1. Believers Should Examine One Another

At first glance, Paul's command to "discern the Lord's body" seems to contradict the Lord's instruction, "Judge not, that you be not judged" (Matt. 7:1). The Lord and Paul do not contradict one another. In fact, we can trace the twofold examination that we have found in 1 Cor. 11:29 not only in Matthew 7, but also in Gal. 6:1 and Jude 20-23. All four passages teach that believers should examine both themselves and their fellow Christians.

4.1.1. Matt. 7:1-5

The "judge not" verse begins a paragraph on judgment in the Sermon on the Mount:

"Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the same measure you use, it will be measured back to you. And why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck out of your eye,' and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck out of your brother's eye" (Matt. 7:1-5).

The Lord develops his teaching in three steps. First he speaks of judging, then of measuring, and finally of cleaning eyes. In each case, we are to apply to others the same standards we apply to ourselves. The error being discussed is not judging others, but being more strict with others than we are with ourselves.

The description of measuring probably refers to the public marketplace. The ancient world did not enforce standard weights and measures as we do now. Unscrupulous merchants might use undersized weights and scoops in measuring out their wares, and thus cheat their customers. Sooner or later, a customer insists on using the merchant's own weights to weigh out the silver or gold to be paid for the produce. Then the merchant's deception turns to his own loss.

The second illustration arises from a common problem in a world of dry summers and dusty dirt roads. Someone gets a speck of sand in the eye, and another offers to help remove it. As we look closer, we find that the helper has a huge plank in his own eye. He cannot even see the sufferer's eye, much less the speck that is lodged in it.

What is the solution to the problem with the merchant? Should he stop trading? That would only deprive him of his livelihood, and his customers of the goods that he sells. He should trade, but with honest weights and measures.

What is the solution to the dusty eye? Should no one help the sufferer? On the contrary, the Lord teaches that we should "remove the speck out of your brother's eye." The problem is not that one person tries to help another, but that the helper is really no help at all so long as he is blind himself. The helper should get his own eye fixed first, and then by all means help his brother.

The Lord applies these illustrations to the question of judgment. Is my life full of sin? Then I had better not judge others, lest they turn and point out my own shortcomings. The solution is not for both me and them to remain unjudged and sinful. I should first remove the sin from my own life. Then, with nothing to hide, I can help others with their problems.

The Lord teaches, "Clean first your own eye, then your brother's." Paul instructs, "Examine yourself, then discern the body." There is no contradiction. Both recognize the importance of Christians helping one another--and the need for self-examination in preparation for such help.

4.1.2. Gal. 6:1

Paul shows the relation between self-examination and helping others in his letter to the Galatians: "Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, each considering yourself, lest you also be tempted" (Gal. 6:1). Note three points about this command.

1. Paul tells believers to "restore" a sinning believer. When one Christian falls into sin, the others are not to fade into the woodwork and pretend to ignore what has happened. On the contrary, Paul commands the church to help the sinner back to spiritual health.
2. It is the "spiritual" person, the mature Christian, who is able to help others who sin. Paul elsewhere points out that as believers grow toward maturity, they learn to overcome sin and live more and more blamelessly: "The spiritual person ... is judged by no one" (1 Cor. 2:15). The requirement of spirituality in Gal. 6:1 is parallel to the self-examination of 1 Cor. 11:28 and removing the plank in Matt. 7:5.
3. Self-examination in preparation for helping others is so important that Paul emphasizes it again with the words, "each considering yourself." In this verse, Paul slips unexpectedly from the plural ("you who are spiritual") to the singular ("yourself," not "yourselves"). He is emphasizing that when the church learns of sin in its midst, every individual believer should respond with self-examination. This process not only prepares the members of the body for their duty of restoration, but also squelches the temptation to gossip against the sinner.

4.1.3. Jude 20-23

Still another example of the two examinations comes from the short epistle of Jude. This translation rearranges the order of the clauses to show their syntax more clearly.

"But you, beloved,
 keep yourselves in the love of God,
 building yourselves up on your most holy faith,
 praying in the Holy Spirit,
 looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.
 And have compassion on some,
 discerning;
 but save others with fear,
 pulling them out of the fire,
 hating even the garment defiled by the flesh" (Jude 20-23).

Jude gives his readers three instructions: "keep yourselves," "have compassion on some," and "save others."

The last two instructions tell us how to deal with Christians who are having spiritual problems. We are not to ignore them, but to analyze their condition carefully and act either with patience or with urgency, depending on the circumstances.

But we dare not rush into such a ministry with planks in our eyes. First of all, Jude tells us to keep ourselves in the love of God. We must be certain that our lives are in order before we can hope to lead others in

godliness. Jude shows the same pattern as do the Lord and Paul. First we examine ourselves. Then we have a duty to help other believers.

In telling us how to "have compassion on some," in his second instruction, Jude uses the same word for "discern" that Paul uses in 1 Cor. 11:29,31. "Discerning the body" is an act of compassion. It is interesting that Jude, like Paul, is concerned about abuses at the Lord's Supper, or "love feast" (Jude 12). Both writers teach the importance of the twofold examination when we gather to remember the Lord.

All of these passages confirm the instructions of 1 Cor. 11:27-29. It is wrong to judge others before examining ourselves. It is also wrong not to "discern the Lord's body," not to know the spiritual condition of those with whom we break bread. The church needs both examinations to grow in practical holiness before the Lord.

4.2. Did Judas Partake of the Last Supper?

Both Paul's instruction in Corinthians (1 Cor. 5:9-11; 11:29) and the symbolism of the Passover meal (Exod. 12:49, excluding the uncircumcised) suggest that oversight at the Lord's Table should include corporate exclusion of inappropriate participants as well as individual examination. Luke 22:21 has been suggested as a counterexample, since it seems to describe Judas at the table in the Upper Room after the words of institution have been spoken. However, Matt. 26:21-25 and Mark 14:18-21 depict the unveiling of the betrayer as coming before the institution of the supper. This memo reviews the evidence for Judas' participation in the supper, and suggests the implications for modern church practice.

Throughout, "Last Supper" refers to the specific Passover meal that the Lord Jesus celebrated with his disciples the night before his execution, while "Lord's Supper" refers to the memorial celebrated by the early church, based on two elements of the "Last Supper."

4.2.1 Data

As noted above, Matthew and Mark have the Lord's discussion of the betrayer before the institution, while Luke has it after. John, who gives the fullest description of what happened with Judas, does not explicitly describe the words of institution at all.

The two elements of the Lord's Supper were instituted at two different times with relation to the Last Supper: the bread was shared "as they were eating" (Matt. 26:26; Mark 14:22), while the cup was shared "after supper" (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor. 11:25). Edersheim's detailed reconstruction of the Last Supper, based on first-century Jewish custom, suggests that a number of things happened in the Passover meal between the two elements that the Lord selected to commemorate his sacrifice (*Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* Book V Chapter X). Once these elements were taken from their matrix in the passover meal, they became part of a single integrated ceremony in the church.

The discussion about the betrayal took place "as they were eating" (Matt. 26:21; Mark 14:18). At first glance, John's record (John 13) seems at variance with this, since the footwashing, which precedes the discussion of Judas, is introduced with the phrase, "supper being ended" (13:2 AV). However, John records the Lord's words identifying the traitor as "he ... to whom I shall give the sop" (the definite article is in the Greek), and Edersheim identifies this sop with a distinctive feature during the passover meal. Early scribes apparently felt this tension, since they altered the verb tense in 13:2 to read "during supper." Even retaining the aorist, Field suggests that the phrase can be read, "the supper having been held," that is, convened but not necessarily completed, thus removing the difficulty, and this seems the best harmonization.

After Judas took the sop, the Lord instructed him to tend to his business, and Judas left "immediately" (John 13:30), suggesting that Judas left the room while the supper was still in progress and therefore at least before the cup. Edersheim identifies the time as just after the beginning of the meal, and before the institution of either element; Westcott (on John 13) suggests that he left between the elements.

4.2.2. Explanations of the different orders in the Synoptic gospels

This is not the only place that the gospels differ in the order of events. Mark in general seems to be the most chronological of the gospels, and all things being equal, one would prefer his ordering of events to Luke's, particularly if a motive for Luke's displacement can be found.

One such motive may be found in Luke's more complete description of the passover meal. He reports, not just the bread and the after-supper cup, but also an earlier cup (22:17), not now a part of the Lord's Supper, concerning which the Lord also said some words. Having mentioned this cup, he goes on to the bread, and then the cup that serves as the basis for the Lord's Supper cup. The desire to keep these sayings together could explain why the reference to Judas is deferred until all three have been quoted.

If Judas left between the elements, it is even easier to understand the differences in order. The regular use of the words of institution at the Lord's Supper in the early assemblies suggests that all three evangelists want to focus on these words, and that they will tend to keep them together as a unit rather than distributing them throughout a detailed narrative of the passover meal. A discussion of the betrayer between the elements means that they must either interrupt the words of institution for a secondary narrative, or that they must displace the discussion of Judas on one direction or another. On this hypothesis, Matthew and Mark slide the discussion earlier, and Luke (perhaps influenced by his desire to include the even earlier first cup) slides it later.

4.2.3. Conclusions

While the timing of Judas' departure is not precisely stated, the evidence suggests that he left at least before the cup was instituted. But assume for the sake of argument that he did not leave until after the cup. While the Last Supper would then give precedent for admitting known unbelievers to the Lord's Supper, it also requires that those unbelievers be publicly identified after the sharing of the elements. The Lord does not treat the spiritual status of the participants as a matter of private concern only (as is done in most churches today). Instead, he publicly raises the issue of Judas' status, as though the elders were to close the supper today with an announcement, "We want you all to know that John, Judy, and Joe, who have just partaken of the supper with us, have been living in sin and do not manifest the character of true believers in Christ."

The Lord not only raised the issue of Judas' apostasy, but (as best we can tell from all the evidence) sent Judas from the Supper while it was still in progress, at least before the cup was instituted, and perhaps before the bread. His example thus supports the need for corporate oversight of participants at the table, and the appropriateness of deliberately excluding known unbelievers or those under discipline at least from the cup. Because the sharing of the bread and the cup are done in close proximity in most gatherings today, exclusion from the cup implies exclusion from the bread as well.

4.3. Table Unity and the Visiting Believer

Believers who live close to one another and meet together regularly can easily discern the local body of Christ. Paul's instructions about examination at the Lord's Supper can help them maintain steady spiritual growth. Sometimes, believers may move from one town to another. Or they may be away from home on a Sunday because of vacation or business. They should seek out a church where they can meet together with God's people. How can the church and the visitor examine one another when they have just met?

The New Testament gives examples of three ways that a church can recognize visitors as believers.

1. The visitor gives **testimony** of salvation to the church.
2. The visitor is **introduced** by someone already in the church.
3. The visitor carries a **letter** of introduction from a mutual friend.

In each case, the church learns that the visitor not only professes salvation, but also shows godly conduct.

4.3.1. Testimony of Faith

Acts 2 records how the early church receives new believers: "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized, and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued

stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine, and in fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:41-42).

The people who enter into the life of the church join in "breaking of bread," the Lord's Supper. The church in Jerusalem can discern that they are now members of the Lord's body because it witnesses their confession of faith. Their confession is in deed as well as in word. The new believers show their obedience to the Lord by baptism.

Every believer first enters the joy of church fellowship by personal confession of Christ. There's no reason to restrict the privilege to new converts. Christians who visit unfamiliar assemblies can tell their new friends how they came to salvation. The elders, in turn, can invite visitors to confess their faith in Christ, and should inquire carefully to see that there is no evident reason to doubt the sincerity of that confession.

4.3.2. Personal Introduction

Saul (later called Paul) first joins with the church at Jerusalem by personal introduction from Barnabas: "When Saul arrived in Jerusalem, he tried to associate with the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem" (Acts 9:26-27).

The believers know Saul only as a persecutor. Because of fear, they will not listen to his testimony. Barnabas hears and believes his story, and sponsors him before the church. The church, out of respect for Barnabas, accepts his endorsement and receives Saul.

Barnabas comments on Saul's conversion: "He had seen the Lord on the road." He also comments on the change in his life: "He had preached boldly." Barnabas wants the church to know that Saul is not a "false prophet" saying "Lord, Lord" just to lead the church astray, or an enemy who wants to slay them.

The example of Barnabas shows how one person may introduce another at the Lord's Supper. When Gary visits Fred's church, Fred may introduce Gary. Such an introduction needs to say more about Gary than his name and home town. Fred should tell the others what they need to know in order to discern that Gary is a member of the Lord's body. Like Barnabas introducing Saul, Fred should make clear to the church that Gary is a believer with a good testimony of faith in Christ.

Perhaps Gary is not a believer, but still wishes to visit the meeting. Then Fred should explain the nature of the Supper to Gary beforehand, and point out why Gary should not participate in it. This explanation offers three benefits:

1. It avoids misunderstanding on Gary's part.
2. It gives Fred an opportunity to explain the gospel to Gary.
3. It helps Gary understand what he will observe.

4.3.3. Letter of Introduction

In Acts 9, Barnabas can speak directly with the leaders of the church. If he were out of town, he might still introduce someone to the group, through a letter. We have an example of an introduction by letter in the last chapter of Paul's epistle to the Romans: "I commend unto you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church that is at Cenchrea. [I do this] so that you may receive her in the Lord, in a way worthy of saints, and help her in whatever matter she might need you, for she has been a helper of many, including myself" (Rom. 16:1-2).

Paul introduces Phoebe as Barnabas introduced Paul, citing both her faith ("our sister") and its fruit in her life ("a servant of the church," "a helper of many"). Paul knows many in the church personally, although he has never been in Rome (Rom. 16:3-15). When he commends Phoebe, it is as though he were there speaking for her to his friends. We may imagine that the church receives her immediately, on the strength of Paul's introduction.

If no one in Rome knows Paul, his letter may not be a sufficient introduction. It shows that Paul accepts her as a sister in the Lord. But who knows whether Paul is a brother? In that case, the elders in Rome will want to interview Phoebe personally before receiving her at the Lord's Supper.

4.3.4. The Visitor's Point of View

The church can receive a visitor through direct testimony, personal introduction, or a letter of introduction. The visitor, in turn, must discern the church as a body of true believers. The church at Rome will receive Phoebe on Paul's recommendation. But will Phoebe feel comfortable at the Supper with people she does not know?

Romans 16 introduces the church to Phoebe as much as it introduces Phoebe to the church. She will not hesitate to break bread with those whom Paul names as believers.

There will be some in Rome whom neither she nor Paul knows. Then she may have to rely on the judgment of the leaders of the assembly. For instance, she may attend the church in the home of Aquila and Priscilla (Rom. 16:3-5). They worked with Paul in new churches both in Corinth and Ephesus (Acts 18). So they will understand the need to "discern the body."

Perhaps, Phoebe finds herself in a gathering where she knows neither the members nor the leadership. In this case, she will wait to share in the Supper until she meets the different families in the gathering. If they understand the meaning of the Supper, they will welcome her caution. When she does participate, their fellowship about the table will be much more precious because she recognizes the unity and commitment that it symbolizes.

4.4. Review Questions

1. Please list some other texts besides 1 Cor. 11 that point out the responsibility of believers to be aware of one another's spiritual condition.
2. What biblical examples do we have for how a church can recognize a fellow believer?
3. Should a believer share in the Supper when visiting a strange church? Please explain your answer.

Chapter 5

Worship is Not a Spectator Sport

If you ask any group of Christians why they "go to church," most of them will probably answer, "To worship God." We associate worship and church meetings so closely together that some groups use the word "worship" as a synonym for "meeting," and schedule "morning worship," "evening worship," and "midweek worship." But what does it mean to worship?

The verb "to worship" in English Bibles most commonly stands for Hebrew and Greek words that originally meant "to bow down, to prostrate oneself." In the Bible, the words extend beyond a physical gesture to describe the mental attitude that we should have toward someone who is powerful and whom we must obey. When believers gather before God to recognize his greatness and their weakness, his grace and their sin, his law and their duty, we may say that they "worship."

Some things that are closely associated with worship should be distinguished from worship. For instance:

- Worship often takes place at a scheduled gathering of believers. But if I attend such a gathering and doze quietly in a comfortable pew, you will hardly say that I have worshiped.
- Worship may bring a psychological thrill to the participants. Yet a thrill, in itself, is not worship, whether it results from a choir anthem or the victory of a favorite athletic team.

Worship is prostrating myself mentally and spiritually before God. It is active, not passive. I do it. It is not done to me.

How well do we understand this kind of worship? How well do we actually do it? This chapter and the next explore some ways of worshipping God in the context of the Lord's supper.

- We observe that bringing offerings is an important part of worship in ancient Israel. The law requires both the priest and the people to worship with gifts.
- Then we look at the role of offerings in New Testament worship, and particularly at the Lord's Supper.

5.1. Offerings in the Old Testament

In the Old Testament, offerings are an important part of worship both for the priest and for the people.

5.1.1. The priests offer.

In the Old Testament, a special priestly family directs Israel's worship. This family is descended from Levi, the son of Jacob. Not every Levite, though, can serve in the sanctuary. Before a man serves as a priest, he must go through a ceremony described in Exodus 29. The various English translations use words like "ordain," "consecrate," and "install" to describe what happens to the priest in this ceremony. Literally, the verses say,

- "You shall **fill** Aaron's **hand** and his sons' **hand**" (verse 9).
- "And the holy garments that are Aaron's shall belong to his sons after him, to be anointed in them and in them to **fill** their **hand**" (verse 29).
- "And they shall eat those things with which the atonement was made, to **fill** their **hand** and to sanctify them" (verse 33).
- "You shall **fill** their **hand** for seven days" (verse 35).

The literal name for the ceremony of ordination (or consecration, or installation) is "filling the hand." With what are the priest's hands filled? The details are in Exod. 29:15-28, and again in Lev. 8:22-30. Aaron and his sons lay their hands on the head of a ram, "the ram of **filling**" (8:22), which Moses then slays. He anoints Aaron and his sons with the blood, then takes portions of the ram (8:25), together with various types of bread (8:26), "and he put all upon Aaron's palms and upon his sons' palms, and waved them for a wave offering before the Lord. And Moses took them from off their palms, and burned them on the altar upon the

burnt offering. They [the sacrifices] are a **filling** for a sweet savor. It is a fire-offering unto the Lord" (Lev. 8:27,28).

The priest's hands are filled with a sacrifice. His main responsibility in the sanctuary is to present sacrifices to God. He must not appear before God with empty hands. So the one who installs him in his office "fills his hands" with his first priestly sacrifice.

5.1.2. The people offer.

In the Old Testament the people worship as the priests do, by bringing sacrifices. The highlights of the Israelite calendar were the three great pilgrimage feasts of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles, when every male was required to appear before the Lord at the tabernacle or temple. Deut. 16:16-17 describes these feasts, and the believer's responsibility.

"Three times a year all your males shall appear before the LORD your God in the place that he shall choose: in the feast of unleavened bread, and in the feast of weeks, and in the feast of tabernacles. **They shall not appear before the LORD empty.** Every man [shall give] according to his ability, according to the blessing of the LORD your God, which he has given you."

"They shall not appear before the LORD empty." They come to present themselves before the Lord, to remember his goodness to Israel and to offer their worship and thanksgiving. Just as the priests cannot worship with empty hands, neither can the people. Everyone does not bring the same offering. "Every man [shall give] according to his ability." But everyone brings something. The requirement is so important that it appears not only in Deuteronomy, but also twice in Exodus.

- "Three times you shall keep a feast unto me in the year. You shall keep the feast of unleavened bread. (You shall eat unleavened bread seven days, as I commanded you, in the time appointed of the month Abib; for in it you came out from Egypt. **They shall not appear before me empty.**) And [you shall keep] the feast of harvest, the firstfruits of your labors, which you have sown in the field; and the feast of ingathering, which is in the end of the year, when you have gathered in your labors out of the field. Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord GOD" (Exod. 23:14-17).
- "You shall keep the feast of unleavened bread. ... **They shall not appear before me empty** ... And you shall observe the feast of weeks, the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the feast of ingathering at the year's end. Three times a year all your males shall appear before the Lord GOD, the God of Israel" (Exod. 34:17-23).

These passages place two requirements on the Israelite.

1. He must appear before the Lord. Worship--*worship in the company of God's people*--is required, not optional.
2. He must bring his offering. *There is no worship without a gift.* The priests cannot worship with empty hands. Neither can the people.

5.2. Offerings in the New Testament

Under the old covenant, God's people constitute a "kingdom of priests," Exod. 19:6. Led by special priests, they themselves worship and bring offerings. New Testament believers are also priests (I Pet. 2:5; Rev. 1:6; 5:10; 20:6), led in worship by a special priest, the Lord Jesus.

God asked Israel to gather together for worship. Solitary worship is not enough. So we must not "forsake ... the assembling of ourselves together" (Heb. 10:25).

When we gather, it is not enough for us to worship by observing the ministrations of our great high priest on our behalf, much less by watching one another. We, like the Israelites, are called to appear before the Lord. Like them, we should not appear empty. Everyone will not bring the same gift. Each will bring "according to his ability." But each must bring something, offering up "spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ" (I Pet. 2:5).

Various passages in the New Testament describe the offerings with which the believer can worship God. These include the gift of one's body (Rom 12:1), praise, good works, and charitable giving (Heb. 13:15). Some of these are especially suited to private worship. We find specific examples for public worship in I Cor. 14:26-40. Paul lists the gifts believers bring before the Lord in I Cor. 14:26: "When you come together, every one of you has a psalm, has a doctrine, has a language, has a revelation, has an interpretation."

Here is a valuable glimpse into the meetings of one group of first century believers. It tells us

- who brings offerings,
- when they bring them,
- and **what** they bring.

5.2.1. Who brings offerings?

Paul notes that when the Corinthians gather together, "every one" is prepared with an offering for the Lord. Like righteous Israelites of old, they do not appear before the Lord empty. Each believer comes with a heart prepared for worship, bearing a gift to offer up to the Lord.

Paul's words warn against two errors that may spoil our worship.

1. They exclude the "one man show," where one believer is active and everyone else is passive.
2. They also rule out a chaotic uproar where everybody talks at once.

The meeting described in Corinth differs markedly from many Christian gatherings today. In Corinth, human leader dominates the meeting. Paul prescribes an atmosphere in which "you may all prophesy, one by one" (14:31). The believers are gathered about the Lord Jesus, and it would detract from his centrality if one of them were to take center stage. The distinction between pulpit and pew disappears as first one, then another of the gathered believers rises to lead the body in worship, and to offer to God the sacrifice of praise that he has prepared.

Every believer should bring an offering. Yet, as we will see in the next chapter, not every believer should present that offering publicly in the meeting. For example, a believer might bring praise to God in a foreign language, but if there is no translator, he is to "keep silence in the church" (1 Cor. 14:28).

At first glance, it seems illogical for someone with a gift to withhold it. If an offering has been prepared, why should it not be publicly presented? If some people cannot speak in the meeting, why should they prepare an offering?

On further thought, we realize that our offerings should be intended for the Lord. Speaking publicly is only one way of presenting an offering. It may also be offered silently. In fact, this is just what Paul urges the believer with an untranslatable offering to do: "Let him speak to himself, and to God" (1 Cor. 14:28).

We will study the public presentation of gifts more in the next chapter. For the moment, we note that those who speak are fewer than those who offer. Not every worshiper will speak aloud. But every worshiper should prepare an offering, perhaps like one of the offerings brought by the Corinthians. And every worshiper should present that offering to the Lord--if not verbally, then in silent prayer.

5.2.2. When are offerings brought?

Paul notes that the believers bring their offerings "when [they] come together" (1 Cor. 14:26). By itself, this clause does not seem to point out any particular kind of church meeting. Our first impression is that whenever the believers gather, whether for prayer, or Bible study, or the Lord's supper, or any other purpose, every one has an offering. Probably, though, this is not what happened at Corinth.

The Greek expression rendered "come together" is very rare in Paul's writings. Besides this chapter (verses 23 and 26), it occurs only in the second half of chapter 11 (verses 17, 18, 20, 33, and 34), describing the Lord's supper. Paul does elsewhere talk about gatherings of believers for different purposes. In 1 Cor. 5:4, for instance, he describes a meeting to exercise church discipline, and in 2 Thes. 2:1 he anticipates the reunion of believers when the Lord Jesus returns. Nowhere else, though, does he use the word that he uses in 1 Cor. 11 and 14.

Paul uses this special word only in these two chapters. Furthermore, he uses it extensively in these chapters—seven times in a total of only twenty-two verses. Most of these occurrences (five in eighteen verses) are in chapter 11. There, as he dwells on the Lord's supper, he describes it over and over again with this special verb. By this repetition, the verb and the supper become linked with one another.

When Paul returns to this verb in chapter 14, he draws our minds back to chapter 11. The "coming together" of chapter 14 is not just any gathering of the church. It is the one described with the same term in chapter 11. The meeting at which the believers "come together" with psalms, doctrines, and other offerings (14:26) is the same one at which they "come together ... to eat the Lord's supper" (11:20).

The identity of these meetings should not surprise us. In worship we prostrate ourselves before one who is incomparably greater and more powerful than we are. When is the contrast greater between the believer's sin and weakness, and the Lord's grace and power, than at the Lord's Supper? The purpose of the meeting is to remember him. His mighty work of redemption, pictured in the bread and in the cup, has made us his joyful slaves, his loyal subjects. The Lord's Supper is a meeting for worship, and worship requires that we come with our offerings prepared.

5.2.3. What offerings do people bring?

All of us should prepare our hearts for worshipful sacrifice when we approach the breaking of bread. The list of offerings in 1 Cor. 14:26 can help us with this task: "When you come together, every one of you has a psalm, has a doctrine, has a language, has a revelation, has an interpretation."

As we discuss these offerings, we should remember that the entire supper is to be "in remembrance of" the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 11:24,25). Through it we "show the Lord's death until he comes" (1 Cor. 11:26). The categories of psalm, doctrine, (foreign) language, revelation, and interpretation are different packages in which we wrap our praise to God. The contents of those packages should focus on the Lord Jesus. He is at the center. We are gathered unto his name. Our thoughts and praises, and the gifts we bring, should help us keep our minds off the distractions of the world around us, and on our Savior.

Some bring a "*psalm*." They select one of the many Old Testament poems that look forward to the coming of the Messiah, and meditate on the character of Christ as the psalmist foresaw him. Those who offer their psalm publicly lead the church in raising up those ancient lines of praise to God.

The early church had other selections in its hymnal, too. Eph. 5:19 lists three categories of music: psalms, hymns (strictly, odes of worship and praise), and spiritual songs (which may include songs of testimony and exhortation). Paul singles out the psalms as particularly appropriate at the breaking of bread. Perhaps he favors the psalms at this feast of remembrance because so many of them prophetically describe the life and passion of the Savior.

Some worshipers bring a "*doctrine*," a systematic teaching. The life and death of Christ is central to the teaching of the early church. Every believer may prepare some thought about the Savior as a basis for lifting up praise to God. Those who offer their doctrine publicly do so to direct the hearts of the worshipers in thanksgiving to God.

Some bring their praise in a *foreign language*. I discuss elsewhere the function of the gift of languages in the New Testament, and the question of its role in the church today. We can understand its place in Corinthian worship if we notice that the things that are uttered through this gift in the New Testament are in the category of praise to God. On the day of Pentecost, those who speak in other languages proclaim "the wonderful works of God" (Acts 2:11). Paul describes their function at Corinth as prayer (1 Cor. 14:2, 14), and more particularly as thanksgiving (1 Cor. 14:16,17). What the Corinthians bring to their meetings in another language are praises to God.

Any believer may offer such a sacrifice silently to God. If a translator is present (14:28), the believer may bring the sacrifice publicly, so that others can echo his thanksgiving in their hearts.

Some of the Corinthian saints bring a "*revelation*," a word from God. "Revelation" is distinct from the "doctrine" mentioned earlier in the verse. The words in which "doctrine" is presented may be composed by anyone. The words of "revelation" are God's words, carefully selected to lead God's people in worship.

In the years before the canon was complete, the Holy Spirit brought insights about Christ directly to the minds of believers. Today, believers have access to revelation about Jesus Christ in the completed canon of the Bible. A worshiper who prepares a text of scripture to offer, either publicly or privately, brings a "revelation" to the Lord's supper.

Finally, some of the Corinthians bring an "*interpretation*." This "interpretation" is not a translation of an utterance in another language. Paul does discuss translation of languages in 1 Cor. 14, but with a Greek word different from the one rendered "interpretation" in 1 Cor. 14:26.

The interpretation that a believer brings to offer to the Lord is related more closely to "doctrine" and "revelation" than it is to "language." It is the connecting link between doctrine and revelation. A **doctrine** is the systematic presentation of a concept or truth, derived from **revelation** (found today in scripture) by **interpretation**.

One person brings a revelation by reading Phil. 2:5-11. Another brings an interpretation by considering how Phil. 2:5-11 sets forth the obedience of Christ Jesus. Yet another brings a doctrine by collecting several other passages to round out the idea.

Worship is not a spectator sport. Throughout the Bible, God's people worship by bringing gifts. The example of the Corinthian church shows that the Lord's Supper is an especially appropriate time for believers to bring their offerings to the Lord. Offerings can be presented silently instead of publicly. The important point is for everyone to prepare a gift for the Lord.

5.3. Review Questions

1. What two categories of people offer gifts in Old Testament worship?
2. Who corresponds to each of these categories today?
3. Who makes offerings in worship in the New Testament?
4. What two errors concerning the number of participants in worship should we avoid?
5. To what meeting of the church did the Corinthians bring their offerings?
6. What sort of offerings does the believer give to God in the New Testament?
7. What sort of offerings are particularly appropriate for gatherings of the Lord's people?

Chapter 6

Etiquette at the Lord's Supper

"Please don't talk with your mouth full." "Your eyes are bigger than your stomach." "Ask, don't reach across the table." Every evening American parents urge their children to mind their manners at the supper table. Every evening hungry children wonder who ever invented such silly rules.

Sooner or later those hungry children grow up into parents. They see their own offspring spraying words and peas together across the table, hoarding second helpings before others have firsts, and knocking over the milk in a mad scramble for the last drumstick. Then, if not before, those parents understand why their own parents labored so hard to teach them etiquette. Good manners are not arbitrary rules. They are principles for making other people comfortable and happy.

Believers need to mind their manners at the Lord's Supper. The Corinthians fell into inconsiderate habits when they gathered to break bread. People began to eat as soon as they arrived, without regard for others. Some stuffed themselves, while others arrived a little late and went hungry. Paul's words to the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 11:33 sound like those of a parent at the dinner table: "When you come together to eat, wait for one another."

The Lord's Supper is a time not just for eating, but also for worship. We can eat with or without manners. We can also offer worship with or without consideration for other believers. For example, when a believer at the Supper praises God in a foreign language, his words should be translated so that others can understand. Otherwise he is rudely excluding the others from participating in his worship. If there is no translator, Christian table manners require him to "be silent in the church, and ... speak to himself and to God" (1 Cor. 14:28). Paul does not give this rule to stifle worship, but to encourage it, by creating an atmosphere in which everybody understands what is said and can join in corporate thanksgiving.

The rule about translating foreign languages is one of many lessons on etiquette at the Lord's Supper that Paul gives the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 14:26-40. We saw in the last chapter that 1 Cor. 14:26 describes **what** the Corinthians offer at the Lord's Supper. The following verses tell **how** they should offer it. Of all the passages in the New Testament that describe the meetings of early believers, this one deals most directly with the Supper, since it describes conduct when the church "comes together," a verb Paul reserves for the breaking of bread. It tells how to act courteously both toward the other guests, and toward the Lord. In our study of this passage,

- we outline its overall **structure**,
- then study the rules for etiquette for those who speak in **unknown languages**,
- for **prophets**,
- and for **women**.

6.1. The Structure of 1 Cor. 14:26-40

1 Cor. 14:26-40 first reports **what** the Corinthians do when they worship (verse 26a), and then tells them **how** to do it (verses 26b-40). The **how** section begins and ends with very similar instructions:

- Let all things be done unto edifying (14:26b);
- Let all things be done decently and in order (14:40).

Bible writers often use such pairs of similar sentences to mark off and characterize a section of text. The two "Let all things be done ..." instructions describe the general goals of etiquette at the Lord's Supper. We want meetings that are

- edifying, producing spiritual growth from the effect of one believer on another; and
- orderly, both as a good atmosphere for edification, and to present a decent appearance to outsiders.

If nobody speaks at the meetings, there will be no edification. If everybody speaks at once, there will be no order. So Paul tells when people should speak at the Lord's Supper, and when they should not. Three of the

paragraphs between the two summary instructions outline the circumstances when various people should and should not speak.

- Verses 27-28 discuss speech and silence for those who speak in a foreign language.
- Verses 29-33a discuss speech and silence for those who prophesy.
- Verses 33b-35 discuss speech and silence for women.

In the fourth paragraph (verses 36-39), Paul reminds the Corinthians that his instructions reflect not just his own convictions, but the will of the Lord.

6.2. Speech and Silence in Foreign Languages

"If any man speak in a foreign language, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that in turn, and let one interpret. But if there be no interpreter, let him be silent in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God" (14:27-28).

The first paragraph is the simplest and shortest. Worship offered in a foreign language should be translated so that all can understand. Otherwise, it should be offered silently. Also, even with an interpreter, only two or at the most three should give praise in a language unknown to the rest of the church.

This paragraph is the only one of the three that does not explain its rules. Explanations are available, though, in the first half of the chapter. In 1 Cor. 14:1-25 Paul describes at length the problems that arise if people cannot understand what is said in the church.

- They cannot be built up by what is said (verse 5).
- They will feel estranged from the speaker (verse 11).
- They cannot join in the praise that the speaker expresses (verse 16).
- If they are unbelievers, they will not be brought to faith in Christ by words they cannot understand (verse 23).

To avoid these problems, worship offered in foreign languages must be translated, or else offered silently.

At a supper party, if one of the guests draws the host aside for a private conversation, the other guests may feel excluded. It is rude for one person to shut the others out in this way. Prayer or praise offered in a foreign language at a meeting of the church amounts to a private conversation between the speaker and the Lord, a conversation that distracts the other believers and prevents them from worshipping. Unless someone translates, offerings in languages unknown to the group should be presented silently.

6.3. Speech and Silence for Prophets

"Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others judge. If any thing be revealed to another who sits by, let the first be silent. For you may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted. And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets. For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace" (14:29-33a).

Paul gives the prophets three instructions, and three reasons for following them. The instructions are:

1. "Let two or three prophets speak." Two or three are to speak at any one meeting. There is no absolute maximum for prophets as there is for those speaking in a foreign language. In both cases, though, an appropriate number is "two or three."
2. "Let the others judge." Those who are not speaking should listen carefully to what the speaker says, so that they can approve and echo his praise. The speaker ministers, not as a soloist, but as a member of the church, a part of a team. It is the church as a group that is lifting up praise and worship to God.
3. "Let the first be silent." Prophets should take turns talking, to avoid the babble of several people speaking at once.

The reasons for the rules are:

1. "You may all prophesy, one by one." The floor is open at the meeting. Not all will speak at any one meeting, for that would exceed "two or three prophets." But all are eligible, and everyone who speaks

should remember that others may also desire time and opportunity to share their thoughts publicly. Taking time at the meeting is like taking a serving at the table. Good manners require that we leave enough for others.

2. "The spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets." Paul's second reason anticipates an objection. "I've got a burden and I have to speak," a prophet might say. "I can't help myself." Paul responds, "Yes, you can." Uncontrolled emotion is not courteous at any supper, including the Lord's. Paul expects prophets to control themselves, even while they prophesy.
3. "God is not the author of confusion, but of peace." The third reason answers another objection. "I can control my spirit," the speaker protests, "but when God's Holy Spirit speaks through me, he takes over. If confusion results, that's his fault, not mine." Paul replies, "If confusion results, then it's not God's Holy Spirit speaking through you, for God doesn't produce confusion among his people." Paul's instructions are a "commandment of the Lord" (14:37). Courtesy to the host requires that we follow the rules of his house.

We've all been at meals where one person dominates the entire conversation. At a supper in honor of the Lord Jesus, no one else should be central. If prophets heed Paul's instructions, there is less chance that one of them will usurp the Lord's place as the center of the gathering.

6.4. Speech and Silence for Women

"As in all the churches of the saints, let your women be silent in the churches, for it is not permitted to them to speak, but to be in subjection, as the law also says. But if they wish to learn anything, let them ask their own husbands at home, for it is a shameful thing for women to speak in church" (14:33b-35).

Foreign languages may be used if the words are translated, but otherwise the worshiper must "be silent in church" (14:28). The prophet may speak in turn, but when another has something to say, "let the first be silent" (14:30). Similarly, for women, there are circumstances for speech and circumstances for silence. They may speak freely at home. In the meeting, though, when the church has "come together" for the Lord's Supper, they are not to speak or even to ask questions.

Paul gives two reasons for his ruling. We will study these reasons. Then we will turn our attention to 1 Cor. 11:5, which seems to differ with the instructions in 1 Corinthians 14.

6.4.1. First Reason: Obey the Law

Paul asks the women "not ... to speak, but to be in subjection, as the law also says" (1 Cor. 14:34). "The law" in the New Testament usually refers to the first five books of the Bible. The reference here seems to be to Gen. 3:16, where God told Eve that her husband would rule over her.

When we study the general principles behind Paul's instructions in the next chapter, we will see that speaking at the Lord's Supper is an act of leadership. A woman who speaks in the meeting leads the men who are present, and thus reverses the order God established in the Garden of Eden. It is not polite for guests at the Supper to behave contrary to the roles that the host has given them, especially since the host is also their creator.

6.4.2. Second Reason: Don't Behave Shamefully

Paul goes on to say that "it is a shameful thing for women to speak in church." Who finds such conduct shameful?

Are other Corinthians offended by women who speak in church? Then godly women will not speak in Corinth, to avoid rudeness to their friends. If only the Corinthians are offended, then Paul's instruction is less urgent in today's society, which accepts women in a more vocal role.

Perhaps, though, a woman speaking at the Lord's Supper is "a shameful thing" before God. Then, whatever other guests at the Supper may think of her participation, a godly woman will not offend her host by doing what he finds shameful.

Does Paul use the word "shameful" to describe man's opinion, or God's? To settle this question, we study other passages where Paul describes conduct with this word "shameful." There are only four in the New Testament: 1 Cor. 14:35 (here), 1 Cor. 11:6, Eph. 5:12, and Tit. 1:11.

- Cor. 14:25. "It is a shameful thing for women to speak in church." This passage gives us no clear indication whether the shame is in the eyes of men, or of God.
- Cor. 11:6. "But if it be a shameful thing for a woman to be sheared or shaved, let her be covered." Like 1 Cor. 14:35, this verse raises the question of who finds certain conduct shameful, but does not answer it.
- Eph. 5:12. "For it is a shameful thing even to speak of the things that are done by them in secret." The passage concerns sins that unbelievers do "in secret." These deeds are shameful before men, because those who do them try to hide them. In the context, Paul says that God rejects their behavior too: "No whoremonger, or unclean person, or covetous man, who is an idolater, has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God" (Eph. 5:5). Even if society were to condone these deeds, they would still be shameful to God, and believers would still avoid them. Eph. 5:12 shows that Paul can use "shameful" to refer to things repugnant both to God and to man. If this is the sense in 1 Cor. 11:6 and 1 Cor. 14:35, then even if society's tastes change, God still considers the conduct shameful, and the believer should not participate in it.
- Tit. 1:11. "[False teachers] lead astray whole households, teaching what they ought not for the sake of shameful gain." This reference shows that Paul does not describe something as "shameful" only because it is not done in polite society. Classical culture honored and rewarded people who could argue both sides of a question skilfully. It is from God's perspective that wages earned from teaching a non-standard gospel are shameful. If Paul uses "shameful" in this sense in 1 Corinthians, it expresses God's distaste for the conduct, not man's, and believers ought to have no part in it.

Our survey shows that Paul uses "shameful" for something shameful only in God's eyes (Tit. 1:11), and for actions despised both by God and by polite society (Eph. 5:12). He never uses it for deeds that God explicitly allows. When he calls something "shameful" in 1 Corinthians, then, we should be warned that God disapproves of it. We do not know what the pagans of Paul's day thought of a woman speaking in a public assembly. Paul finds the practice shameful, and reminds us that what he writes "are the commandments of the Lord" (14:37).

We may not know why God finds it shameful for a woman to speak in church. This is no reason to ignore his revealed tastes. We all have our own peculiar preferences. Even though our friends may not understand them, they still show us the courtesy of trying not to offend them. If we are sometimes inscrutable, how much more the God whose glory it is to conceal a thing (Prov. 25:2)? Moses knew that "the secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things that are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29). We may not know why he considers some things shameful. The fact that he has told us he does is enough to guide our conduct.

6.4.3. The Teaching of 1 Corinthians 11

In 1 Cor. 11:2-16, Paul requires women to wear a covering when they "pray or prophesy." The reference to women praying is not remarkable. Women should pray silently at the Lord's Supper, offering up their own worship and echoing the praises voiced by the men. Prophecy is another matter. How can Paul allow women to prophesy in one chapter, and then forbid it three chapters later?

Many solutions have been proposed for this puzzle. The simplest seems to be that the two passages describe different circumstances. Chapter 14 and the second half of chapter 11 regulate behavior at the Lord's Supper. The first half of chapter 11 deals primarily with other settings.

There is a clear division between the two halves of 1 Corinthians 11.

- Verses 2 through 16 begin, "Now I praise you, brethren" (11:2). These are the verses that talk about women being covered when they pray or prophesy. There seems to be a weak dissenting voice at Corinth (11:16), but on the whole Paul is satisfied with the Corinthian's conduct on these issues.

- By contrast, verses 17 through 34 begin, "Now in declaring this I not praise" (11:17). These verses describe the church when it "comes together" to break bread. At this meeting, their conduct needs some improvement.

The corrective part of chapter 11 begins, "Now in declaring this I do not praise, because you come together not for the better but for the worse. For first of all, when you come together in assembly, I hear that there exist divisions among you ... "(11:17,18).

These words suggest that the Lord's Supper is not in view earlier in the chapter. The first reference to the church "coming together" in 1 Corinthians 11 is in verse 17. Paul does not qualify his criticism: "You come together not for the better but for the worse." The first half of the chapter, though, begins with strong praise: "Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things, and keep the traditions, as I delivered to you" (11:2). If both passages deal specifically with the Lord's Supper, this contrast is very strange. The two statements make more sense if the first half of chapter 11 describes conduct in general, while the second half focuses on the Lord's Supper. Paul praises them for their general obedience, then picks out one particular area that needs attention.

Verse 18 also suggests that the first half of the chapter is more general than the second. That verse begins, "For first of all, when you come together in assembly," These words seem to be raising the issue of "coming together" for the first time. If they are, the earlier portion of the chapter must describe more general circumstances.

In general women may pray and prophesy, if they cover their heads. For example, Tit. 2:4 shows older women instructing younger ones. The first half of 1 Corinthians 11 requires women to be covered whenever they pray, even in private, "because of the angels" (11:10). "In assembly" the covering is still appropriate, for they should pray silently. "It is not permitted for [women] to speak," though, in prophesy or public prayer. If they do speak, they offend the Lord whom they gather to remember.

In 1 Cor. 14:27-39, Paul gives instruction to three different groups of people at the Lord's Supper: those who speak in other languages, those who prophesy, and the women. His instructions to them can guide us in the same situations today. In the next chapter, we will see that they can guide us in other situations, too.

6.5. Review Questions

1. Please outline 1 Cor. 14:26-40.
2. Please give two examples of people who should worship without speaking.
3. Why should praise in a foreign language be translated?
4. What basis is there in the law for women not to speak at the Lord's Supper?
5. To whom is it shameful for a woman to speak in assembly?
6. Why does Paul allow a woman to prophesy in 1 Corinthians 11, but not in 1 Corinthians 14?

Chapter 7

How to Offer Your Gift

The paragraphs from 1 Corinthians 14 that we studied in the last chapter guide us if questions arise at the Lord's Supper about untranslated utterances in foreign languages, overeager prophets, or women preachers. As we studied these examples, we saw a few principles repeated over and over again. In this chapter, we extract these common principles. They can guide us in offering our gifts to the Lord, even under circumstances that Paul does not describe explicitly.

Our procedure is a little like studying a layer cake after it has been cut. Each slice contains a part of every layer. To see any one layer in its entirety, we must retrieve it from the various slices and reassemble it.

The specific cases of foreign languages, prophets, and women in 1 Corinthians 14 are like slices cut from a layer cake. The layers of the cake are general principles of church etiquette. Now that we have studied the three slices individually, we can extract the common principles that they contain.

Three principles emerge. All occur in at least two of the cases Paul discusses. The principles are:

- The speaker leads the hearers in worship.
- Speakers can be too few or too many.
- Worship may be silent as well as spoken.

7.1. The Speaker Leads the Hearers in Worship

The first principle emerges from Paul's instructions to translate praise into a language understood by the church. One reason for this rule is in 1 Cor. 14:16: "Otherwise, when you bless with the Spirit, how shall he who occupies the place of the unlearned say 'Amen' at your thanksgiving, since he does not understand what you are saying?"

A person who says "Amen" is showing hearty agreement with the words of someone else. At the Lord's Supper, when someone praises God, the others are not daydreaming until their turn comes to say something. They listen to his words of praise in order to echo them silently in prayer to God. The speaker is like a musical conductor, guiding the worship of the entire church. Others say "Amen" as they "judge" his statements (1 Cor. 14:29), agree with them, and join wholeheartedly in his praise.

All three cases in 1 Cor. 14:27-35 reflect the principle of leadership through spoken worship.

- Praise in a foreign language must be translated. If the believers do not understand the speaker, they cannot judge his words, agree with them, echo them to God, and affirm this with "Amen." The speaker may be worshiping, but the church is not--at least, not as a church. The others might as well be in their individual prayer closets, conducting their private devotions.
- Both prophets and those who bring another language should take turns speaking. If each were conversing privately with the Lord, all could stuff their ears with cotton and praise God aloud at the same time. In that case, they might as well not come together. They speak one by one so that all can join in the worship that each one has prepared.
- Women are not to speak in the meeting. They are as capable as are the men of preparing an offering, and the Lord desires their worship as much as the men's. But one who offers spoken praise leads the others in worship, and it is on the men that the New Testament lays the responsibility for church leadership: "I do not permit a woman to teach, or to have authority over the man, but to be in silence" (1 Tim. 2:12). Because the woman should not take the man's place of leadership, she should not lead in spoken worship. She may join verbally in singing psalms of praise and in reciting scripture together with the other believers, for in these actions she is not leading the church.

We can apply this principle to other situations. For instance, a speaker may carelessly begin to slur his words and mumble his praises. If others cannot understand what he says, he might as well be speaking an unknown and untranslated language. The speaker should present his praise clearly and loudly enough for all

to understand. He need not speak at all. If he does, he is leading the church's worship, and should lead distinctly, so that others can follow.

7.2. Speakers can be Too Few or Too Many

How many people should speak aloud at the Lord's Supper? In traditional churches, a single priest or minister may lead an entire service. At the other extreme, we can imagine a meeting where everybody tosses in a short thought. The right number lies somewhere in between. Paul tells the Corinthians that two or three prophets, and two or at the most three people speaking in other languages, is about right.

A single speaker is not enough, and poses two dangers to the church.

1. It is easy for people to focus their admiration on the leader, instead of on the Lord.
2. If one person always leads in worship, the others can grow lazy in preparation, and begin coming before the Lord with empty hands.

So Paul says "two or three," and not "one or two."

There can be too many speakers, as well as too few. Paul says "two or three," not "ten or twenty." These words guard against a meeting with so many short, disconnected thoughts that the worshipers are distracted. A few carefully prepared meditations are better than many short impromptu devotions. The Lord desires whole burnt offerings, not a cloud of pious popcorn.

The problem of too many speakers may arise if we misunderstand the moments of silence that naturally arise at the Lord's Supper. This silence is not wasted time that must be plugged as quickly as possible with an extemporaneous thought or a hastily chosen hymn. It is, rather, an chance to echo what has been said; an occasion for those who cannot speak to worship silently; a time for those who might speak to consider prayerfully whether they should. When a brother breaks the silence, it should be because the Spirit directs him to offer his sacrifice then, not simply because no one else is speaking.

7.3. Worship may be Silent as Well as Spoken

The principles of priesthood require believers to bring offerings when they come to worship the Lord. The principles of etiquette may require them not to offer their praise publicly. Our third principle explains how to satisfy both requirements at once.

This principle emerges from Paul's instruction to the person who speaks in another language: "But if there is no translator, let him be silent in the church, and let him speak to himself and to God" (I Cor. 14:28). Paul tells the one who wishes to speak to remain silent. Silence alone, though, does not satisfy Paul's directions. While he is silent, he should offer his gift to the Lord.

The worshiper with an untranslatable language is not the only one who is to be silent at the Lord's Supper. Later in this chapter, Paul asks women not to speak when the saints come together. He does not mean that they cannot worship at all, but only that they should silently present their gifts to the Lord.

The principle of silent worship reminds us not to equate speech with worship.

- There can be worship without speech. We can talk to God silently, in prayer. We can meditate on a passage of scripture that draws our attention to the Lord Jesus Christ, and quietly praise God for each perfection of our Savior that it brings to mind. This private fellowship with God requires spiritual fortitude. The world, the flesh, and the devil all conspire to pull our minds away from the one whom we are gathered to remember. To resist their lure, we need preparation as much for silent worship as for spoken. If we come to the meeting with some scripture on which to rest our eyes and hearts, we will find it easier to worship without daydreaming.
- There can be speech without worship. Sometimes we may bring a thought to the Supper, ostensibly as an offering to the Lord, but actually intended primarily for the ears of other believers. We may not fully realize that we have missed our goal.

A chemist uses litmus paper to learn whether a substance is acid or base. The principle of silent worship is spiritual litmus paper. We use it to examine our worship by asking ourselves, "Would I be disappointed if I did not have the opportunity to present my gift before the others, and instead could only bring it privately to the Lord?" When we are content to praise the Lord privately, we can be most confident that our motive is to worship him, not to glorify ourselves before men. Ironically, we are then in the best condition to lead others in public worship.

The Lord's Supper should not be like the dining hall at an ill-disciplined camp, a chaotic scramble that frays the nerves and leaves the diners exhausted. Nor does it need to reflect the formality and coldness of a state dinner. Simple principles of etiquette make it a warm family reunion. It is a time of worship to the Lord, where those who speak help those who do not speak to join in thanksgiving and praise for him who loved us and gave himself for us.

7.4. Review Questions

1. Why may women sing hymns but not speak at the Lord's Supper?
2. Please discuss the disadvantages of too few or too many speakers at the Supper.
3. Why should those who never speak still prepare for public worship?
4. How can a speaker guard against speaking out of pride rather than out of worship?