

## | 1 Corinthians |

Week 16 Scripture Guide | 1 Corinthians 10:15-22; 11:17-34

### Biblical Context

The Corinthian church was operating with spiritual arrogance and a lack of love. As God's people, Paul used the Israelites as an example to illustrate the dangers associated with spiritual arrogance. They had first-hand experience of God's signs, wonders, and deliverance, participating in the initiatory events analogous to baptism and communion ("spiritual food and drink"). In spite of this, many were overtaken by immorality and idolatry. The Corinthians are walking the same fine line. While God provides a "way of escape" for general temptation (1 Cor 10:13), Christians are not to put themselves in a position to test God. Paul delivers a clear injunction highlighting the way of escape—"Therefore, my beloved, flee idolatry" (10:14). He points to the Lord's Supper as grounds for any "sensible" Corinthians to judge the situation rightly (10:15). The elements of the Lord's Supper are the cup and the bread, which represent the blood and body of Jesus. Paul shows how the partaking of "the cup of blessing"<sup>1</sup> and "the bread" is participation (κοινωνία, *koinōnia*, "fellowship") with the blood and body of Christ (10:16). Just as we have fellowship with Christ and one another in this ritual meal, so some Corinthians were inadvertently "participating" with the object of the pagan altar when they ate food sacrificed to idols. Both Paul and the Corinthians "know" that an idol has no power or authority in and of itself (8:1, 4; 10:19). What he plainly states, however, is "what pagans sacrifice [to idols] they offer to demons and not to God" (10:20a).<sup>2</sup> The Israelites did not overtly abandon God in pursuit of idolatry, rather they mixed the two.<sup>3</sup> In Exodus 32:4-5, Aaron made a golden calf and said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt! ... Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD." Paul reminds the church, "I do not want you to be participants (κοινωνός, *koinōnos*) with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons" (10:20b-21). As the Israelites provoked God to jealousy and anger by worshipping idols (Deut 32:21), Paul asserts that Christians should not provoke God to jealousy by participating in idolatrous celebrations (1 Cor 10:22a).<sup>4</sup>

In contrast to Paul's commendation (ἐπαινέω, *epaineō*, "praise") of the Corinthians for maintaining traditions as he previously delivered them (1 Cor 11:2, which will be addressed later), he again chides the Corinthians for the divisions (σχίσμα, *schisma*, 11:17-18; cf. 1:10) found among them, corporately. "But in the following instructions I do not commend (*ouk epaineō*) you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions (*schisma*) among you" (11:17-18). The lack of *koinonia* ("fellowship") is evidenced by the presence of divisions and factions, particularly concerning the Lord's Supper which is supposed to portray participation (*koinonia*) in Christ's sacrifice and with one another (10:16).<sup>5</sup> In light of their divisions, their gatherings were doing more harm than good. "The Corinthian problem was not their failure to gather, but their failure truly to be God's newly formed people when they assembled."<sup>6</sup> While not speaking positively of the divisions, Paul indicates that these factions were necessary (δεῖ, *dei*) in order that those who are genuine (δόκιμος, *dokimos*) among in the church may become manifest.<sup>7</sup> From an eschatological perspective, Paul expected divisions to come, separating true

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<sup>1</sup> "The cup of blessing" is the name of the final cup at a Passover Seder (and presumably the Last Supper). "Just as participation in the Passover celebration entailed participation in the benefits of the Passover sacrifice (cf. Exod 12:27; 34:25; Deut 16:2, 5-6; 2 Chron 35:1, 6, 11), participation in the Lord's Supper entails participation in the benefits of his sacrifice for us." Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, "1 Corinthians," in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI; Nottingham, UK: Baker Academic; Apollos, 2007), 727.

<sup>2</sup> Again connecting the current situation in Corinth with the ancient Israelites, Paul draws from Deuteronomy 32, "[The Israelites] sacrificed to demons (Heb. *sedim*, Gr. <sup>LXX</sup> *daimonion*) that were no gods, to gods they had never known... You were unmindful of the Rock that bore you, and you forgot the God who gave you birth. ... They have made me jealous with what is no god; they have provoked me to anger with their idols" (Deut 32:17-8, 2; cf. 1 Cor 10:4b).

<sup>3</sup> Worship of the God of Israel mixed with idolatry is a theme throughout the Old Testament. Like the Israelites, the Corinthians in particular (and the universal church in general) have an opportunity to influence the world around them yet are seemingly often more so influenced by the surrounding culture. As the Israelites sometimes acted like the nations around them so the Christians in Corinth were, in many ways, behaving like the Corinthian unbelievers.

<sup>4</sup> God's jealousy is not to be understood in terms of the sinful human emotion, but God's concern to protect the truth that he is the Creator of all, the Deliverer of his people, and the one who deserves praise, honor, and the devotion of his people.

<sup>5</sup> When Paul mentioned the schisms previously (1 Cor 1:10), they were concerning the preference of one teacher over another based on charisma and teaching style, along philosophical lines. Here, however, their division is more over sociological lines—between the "haves" and the "have nots."

<sup>6</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., Revised Edition., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 594.

<sup>7</sup> The word *dokimos* (genuine) is related to the word Paul used regarding those who are not spiritually disciplined, *adokimos* (disqualified; 1 Cor 9:27).

believers (*dokimos*) from those who were false (*adokimos*) (cf. Matt 13:24-30; 36-42).<sup>8</sup> This started becoming evident by the way many behaved in the context of the church gathering and partaking of the Lord's Supper. Many in the Corinthian church were still looking through cultural lenses rather than the lenses of the gospel. Some wealthier Corinthians suffered from "selfish elitism" and rather than have *koinonia* with other Christians through the Lord's Supper, they were divided by social classes as they congregated. The Christians might be gathering, but Paul says that it is *not* the Lord's Supper that they eat (1 Cor 11:20).<sup>9</sup> Rather than come together to honor the Lord through *koinonia*, they were coming together to honor themselves, eating privately and excluding others. By their actions they show they despise the church of God—that the church as a community of believers from all walks of life counts for nothing in their eyes. Thus, when they came together, it is not for the better, but for the worse (11:17). Since the Corinthians were not rightly observing the Lord's Supper (11:20), Paul expounds on the purpose of the meal in 11:23-26. The institution of the Lord's Supper is from Jesus himself (11:23a; Luke 22:14-23), and Paul reminds the Corinthians that he has already delivered this tradition to them.

Jesus identified himself with the elements of the meal: the bread representing his body and the cup of wine representing his blood. Bread and wine were traditional elements of Jewish meals, however these elements carry a different weight to them during the time of Passover. Identifying with the broken bread (which may have been unleavened bread) and the cup of blessing, Jesus was identifying himself with the Passover sacrifice.<sup>10</sup> When Jesus says that the cup represents "the new covenant in my blood" (11:25), he is drawing elements from both Exo 24:8 ("the blood of the covenant") and Jer 31:31 ("a new covenant"). Thus, "Jesus interprets his impending death as the sacrifice that establishes the new covenant associated with the second exodus."<sup>11</sup> The Passover meal was a memorial and reflection of the exodus redemption, and Jesus reflects on how the elements point to himself as the ultimate fulfillment. By its very nature, the Lord's Supper is a covenant meal and the one participating in the meal is identifying himself as having *koinonia* (fellowship) with Christ's sacrifice.<sup>12</sup> When the church eats the bread and drinks the cup, in this manner, the sacrifice of Jesus is proclaimed in the life of every believer until he comes (11:26). Many Corinthian believers were eating the bread and drinking the cup in an unworthy manner (11:27). The manner in which the wealthy Corinthians were having their private meals to the exclusion and humiliation of the "have nots" was inconsistent with the nature of Christ's sacrifice and the *koinonia* to which we are called—"the ground is always equal at the foot of the cross."<sup>13</sup> Paul thus instructs for believers to examine themselves prior to taking the bread and the cup which proclaims the selfless sacrifice of Christ (11:28). To lack discernment in the body of Christ when partaking of the Lord's Supper (11:29) is to not understand that the bread and the cup represent Christ's sacrifice for all (cf. Gal 3:28) and that the one partaking must be compliant with the covenant. "To sin against the body and blood of the Lord (v. 27) is to sin against the new covenant established by Christ's body and blood, calls down judgment on oneself and on the community, and thus is to be avoided at all costs (vv. 28–34)."<sup>14</sup> No matter the social class or background each is to be viewed as one for whom Christ died.

## Connection and Application

The Lord's Supper has been a tradition in the Christian community since the night of Jesus' betrayal. Jesus' sacrifice is what restores our relationship to God and to one another. Many Corinthians failed to recognize this significance and were building walls and causing divisions within the church. Taking the bread and the cup and corporately recognizing that it represents Christ's broken body and shed blood proclaims Jesus' sacrifice until he returns (1 Cor 11:26; Luke 22:18). When Christians partake of the bread and the cup in this manner, we are proclaiming the significance of Jesus sacrifice in our own lives, the restoration of relationship we have with God, the unity we have with other Christians, and also anticipate the return of Jesus. The ground is level at the cross.

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<sup>8</sup> Remember that the Corinthians held an over realized eschatology, acting arrogantly as if the end had already come and they had already "arrived," spiritually. Paul, like most Christians holding orthodox belief, today, held to an "already/not yet" view of the Kingdom of God. Through the Spirit, God dwells within each believer (1 Cor 3:16), but when the Kingdom is fully realized, God will dwell fully among his people (Rev 21:3).

<sup>9</sup> "The Lord's Supper" uses the possessive adjective *kyriakon*, "belonging to the Lord" or "the Lord's own supper" and stands in sharp contrast to "one's own (*idion*) supper" (11:21). Some suggest the *idion* can mean "private," insinuating exclusive meals for the more elite class.

<sup>10</sup> Paul had already made the connection of unleavened bread and Passover lamb with Jesus (1 Cor 5:6-8).

<sup>11</sup> Ciampa, 736.

<sup>12</sup> This is one of the only things you will hear Midtown ask non-believers not to do, because it is not true for them yet.

<sup>13</sup> Fee, 620. This phrase is often interpreted to also point toward a time of confession and repentance prior to partaking of the bread and cup.

<sup>14</sup> Ciampa, 555. This is consistent with Paul's example of the Israelites' judgement that occurred in the wilderness (1 Cor 10:1-13).