

THE ASSEMBLY MESSENGER

Proclaiming the Timeless Truth of the Church to a New Generation of Believers

Volume 00-42

Dear Reader

In this newsletters we will continue our study of Assembly Truth in 1 Corinthians, the book that contains more truth on the functioning of the local assembly than any other portion of Scripture. We begin with chapter 5.

ASSEMBLY TRUTH IN 1 CORINTHIANS 5-10:17

Chapter 5

An on-going sexual sin in the Corinthian assembly was the occasion for Paul with apostolic authority to give written instructions to all who are gathered to the Lord's name (1:1-2) for maintaining holiness and godly order in a local assembly (v.1). Verse 2 shows how important it is for the assembly to have *God's* honor in view and not to act, or fail to act, because of fleshly pride (vv.2-3; 4:18). It is most humbling to have to take action against sin in the midst, involving friends and even family.

vv.3-5: When an assembly is gathered together in the Lord's name, with the power of the Lord Jesus Christ, it has divinely-given *authority* to act *according to Scripture*. This authority extends to the most severe form of discipline — *excommunication* or *putting away from among yourselves*. At least when the apostles were involved (see also 1 Tim.1:20) in the action, the excommunication included delivering the sinning person to Satan, not that Satan might kill the person (which he would like to do), but that, being in Satan's sieve (Lk.22:31), the *flesh* (the corrupted nature mankind is born with) may be made of no effect and the believer restored. Paul was with the Corinthians in spirit in this necessary action, for there must be *proper behavior* in the house of God, the Church (1 Tim.3:15). There was not to be glorying that such action was necessary. Perhaps if the Corinthians had earlier carried out lesser forms of discipline (1 Thes.5:14; 2 Thes.3:6, 14-15; etc.) instead of being puffed up and ignoring the situation (v.6), this extreme discipline — actually admitting that all discipline had failed — would not have been necessary. It is evident from the context and from 2 Corinthians 7 that the defilement that leavened the assembly was due to the *immorality*, not the assembly being puffed up (as has been claimed recently).

Verse 6: This verse gives a major principle of Scripture: "A little leaven (yeast) leavens the whole lump." *Leaven* is always a picture of (active) sin, and if allowed to continue in the local assembly, it will continue and spread in an insidious way until all is permeated. How is the leaven stopped? In bread dough, the action of leaven is stopped by *intense heat* in the oven. In the assembly it is stopped by the *heat of discipline*. "Therefore, *purge out* the old leaven that you may be a new lump." The Greek word for *purge* is *ekkathairo* (only found here and in 2 Timothy 2:21) and means "to cleanse out, cleanse *thoroughly*" (Vine). As blood-bought saints the Corinthians *were* unleavened as far as eternity was concerned, but they were to *act* in God's government in His Assembly on earth to become again unleavened in a practical sense, for they were *corporately defiled*. 2 Corinthians 7:9-11 shows that by the action they took in purging out this wicked Christian man, they had *repented* (7:9-10) and had *cleared themselves* (v.11) of the corporate defilement.

Bob Costen gives us some interesting thoughts of what leaven is, in relation to different groups — their special sin:

- The leaven of the Pharisees (Mt.16:12) — Hypocrisy
- The leaven of the Sadducees (Mt.16:12) — Unbelief
- The leaven of the Galatians — Legalism (Law-Keeping)
- The leaven of the Corinthians — Immorality
- The leaven of the Herodians — Worldliness

vv.7-8. By Old Testament example, we are given the process which helps ensure that such defilement does not occur. During the whole week, each of us should be in the value of the Passover (v.7) and figuratively should "keep the feast" of unleavened bread (v.8) since any *leaven* will hinder our fellowship with the Lord. In Israel, all leaven

was put out of their houses for seven days (one week) after they ate the Passover (Ex.12:15-20). “Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us” (v.7). When we gather together to remember Him, we should come “*approved*” (1 Cor.11:28 JND) in light of having eaten the Passover and of a week lived with leaven (sin) judged and put out of our lives. This should be a week-by-week process of self-judgment. *Approval* (Gk: *dokimazo* — to prove with a view to approval, Vine) is a major step beyond *examination*, as in the KJV and NKJV.

vv.9-11: These verses show we are not to isolate ourselves from unsaved people. The instructions given here are dealing with *professed Christians in the local assembly*. People of the world only have a sinful nature which sins: it’s all their sinful nature can do, although their lives may be covered by a veneer of respectability and civilization. The *root* determines the *fruit*! We are free to work with the unsaved and associate with them in our neighborhoods, etc. That is how we are a *testimony* to the unsaved. But God holds the *professed believer in the assembly* to a much higher standard. And that standard goes far beyond sexual immorality to all forms of morality. *Moral* simply means what is right; *immoral* means what is wrong. When one in the local assembly is found in an *unaltered course* of sin, whether sexual sin, extreme covetousness, idolatry, abusive language, drunkenness, extortion or swindling, etc., that one is to be judged as unfit for fellowship personally and corporately. One is not even to eat a common meal with such a person. God expects the person to really *feel* the disapproval of all in the assembly and thus of the Lord Himself.

vv.12-13: The assembly cannot judge those of the world (outside): that is up to God. But the assembly *is* to judge those inside — in its midst. When the sin reaches the willful, continued-in stage like that of the immoral man, God’s command is plain. Put the *wicked* person (although a Christian) away, not only from assembly fellowship, but from *among yourselves*! Galatians 5:9 shows that the same action applies to a course of serious *doctrinal sin* because it likewise will leaven the whole lump, the whole assembly. The details of action are not given there because they already are given in 1 Corinthians 5 and don’t need to be repeated.

Note that 2 Corinthians 2:5-11 show that the discipline imposed by “the many” had its desired effect. The immoral man was restored, the sin obviously stopped and confessed. As we also saw in the last issue, the *assembly* was then put to the test in truly forgiving and comforting the former sinner, and in “reaffirming your love to him.” Otherwise, Satan would take advantage of the man’s sorrow over his sin and of the assembly’s unforgiving spirit.

Chapters 6 and 7

We are not to take fellow saints to law for our profit. Such cases should be handled by the assembly appointing brothers who are wise, to handle the situation and make the appropriate determination (6:1-8). If one has gone to law in ignorance, he should be instructed in the truth. If he rejects that instruction, then the case is far more serious. It is implied that the antagonists are to accept the judgment of the wise brethren, even if the person doesn’t agree with the verdict (v.7). In fact, it would have been better to just have “accepted wrong” than to act against one’s brother in such matters.

Verses 9-11 name some rather terrible sins, including homosexuality. Verse 11 states that some in the Corinthian assembly once were involved in these sins, before they were saved. Being washed (born again) and set apart by the Lord Jesus and the Holy Spirit, they now were free of these things — even free of homosexuality/lesbianism. This portion shows that one’s unsaved life, now forsaken, does not affect one’s standing in the local assembly. But those same sins *in a Christian* bring judgment. The Lord Jesus told the woman taken in adultery to go and *sin no more* (Jn.8:1-11).

vv.13-20. Paul particularly emphasizes sexual sin in this section. If that was a problem among Christians 1950 years ago, think how much worse it is today where sex is everywhere and all forms of sexual immorality are glorified, and Christian morality is scoffed at! In verse 19 the *individual’s* body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, so we are not our own. So each is to “flee sexual immorality” (v.18). It is notable, as we have seen, that God uses *sexual* sin to illustrate His hatred of all moral sin. Is it because sexual sin is so easy to fall into? But, thank God, when stopped and confessed, it can be completely forgiven and all can and should go on together in the assembly. Note that a Christian’s body ...

- is not for sexual immorality (fornication, KJV), but for the Lord

- is a member of Christ
- is the temple of the Holy Spirit
- belongs to God.

Chapter 7 has primarily to do with *marriage*, a definite picture of Christ and His Church (Eph.5:22-33). He ordained these things in “all the churches (assemblies)” (v.17). Some portions of this chapter are difficult to translate and the meaning may thus be somewhat obscure. But unless the marriages of those in the assembly are right, the assembly *itself* won’t be right, being comprised of those individuals. It is not our purpose to go into details: for those details we suggest the small book, *Man+Woman: God’s Design*, R.P.Daniel, Believers Bookshelf.

Chapter 8

The eighth chapter covers “the eating of things offered to idols” (v.4). The problem is its effect on others (v.7) in the assembly, weaker ones who haven’t fully grasped Christian liberty (v.7). It is part of one-body truth to be concerned as to how our conduct will affect others, even causing them to sin, and thus sinning ourselves (vv.9-12). In our assembly (and private) relationships, we need to resolve not to stumble others.

Psalm 115:1-8 is helpful in relation to idols. Idols are nothing in themselves, being only dead material, and “there is no other God but one. For even if there are so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth (as there are many gods and many lords), yet for us there is one God, the Father ... and one Lord Jesus Christ” (8:5-6). Let us be true to divine Persons! See verses 4-13. Note that the danger with idols is that *demons* are behind them, seeking worship (1 Cor.10:19-20).

Chapter 9

The apostle Paul’s credentials are given in verses 1-6 as the Corinthians were saved through his preaching and he was 18 months in Corinth teaching the Word of God among them (Acts 18:4-11; 2 Cor.3:1-3). Then he gives them examples from nature (v.7) and from the Scriptures (vv.8-14), that it is right and proper for God’s servants to receive practical support from the believers. So it is proper for assemblies to minister practical things — money generally — to those who minister holy things, as the Lord has commanded (vv.13-14), and which we recently studied in detail. So *giving* is part of our assembly lives, and our private ones too. Those who (faithfully) preach the Word are to live from that preaching.

Yet Paul did not write this for his own gain (v.15). He was entrusted with an administration to preach the glad tidings. So he said, “Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel” (v.16). He also preached the gospel without charge, that he might not abuse his right to so preach (v.18). The lesson is that the *unsaved* should never be charged to hear the gospel. The *believers* should support the faithful preacher who takes nothing from the unsaved (3 Jn.7-8): he is not to act like many of the popular televangelists who are constantly seeking money! “For we are not, as so many, *peddling* [or, *retailing*] the Word of God, but as of sincerity” (2 Cor.2:17).

Paul uses himself as an example. Being free from all, he made himself a bondman or slave, that he might through the gospel win both Jews and Gentiles, and the weak, to Christ. *He wanted people to be saved* (v.22)! He was in a race, running to obtain an incorruptible crown and thus was temperate or moderate in all things, and maintained control of his body so as to not be disqualified in his service (v.27). May we too be spiritually moderate in all things so we can preach the gospel freely — without personal restriction of, for example, a bad conscience or the Holy Spirit grieved as to our conduct — and that we might too receive an incorruptible crown to be received at the “bema” (judgment-seat or tribunal) of Christ. May we too not be *disqualified* in relation to our service by, for example, some crime or sexual indiscretion. No true Christian can be disqualified as to his salvation! So the Corinthian *assembly* was told to “run in such a way that you may obtain the [prize]” (v.24). While every Christian equally enjoys heaven, there are differing “rewards” in service for Christ during the 1000 years reign, when we reign with Him. Don’t we want a “full reward”?

Chapter 10

vv.1-4 shows God's protection and provision of spiritual food and drink for the Jewish fathers, but with most of them God was not well pleased. The spiritual food and drink of verses 3-4 are mentioned to challenge us, for God gives us *Christ*, the Bread of Life, and the old corn of the land — the heavenly Christ — to feed on. Of course for Israel, they fed on the manna, but we can feed on Christ both in humiliation and as risen, ascended and glorified. Spiritual drink for us refers to drinking in the Holy Spirit's ministry concerning that lovely Man (Jn.7:37-39; 1 Cor.12:13). What are we feeding on? As the prodigal said in Luke 15:17, there was bread enough to spare in the *Father's* house.

vv.5-10. God was not pleased with many who came out of Egypt and therefore they died in the wilderness because:

- they lusted after sinful things (v.6)
- some were idolaters (v.7)
- they sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play (v.7)
- they committed sexual immorality (v.8)
- they tested Christ (v.9)
- they murmured (complained) (v.10)

Evidently many didn't have faith (Heb.3:16-4:2) and thus died. They could not enter the promised land, God's rest, because of their unbelief.

vv.11-15. God told the Corinthian assembly to consider the Old Testament examples of improper behavior, and learn by those examples. They "were written for *our* admonition" (v.11). That's why God recorded them! He wants us to take heed because even though we are saved, we still are in this body of humiliation, and if not careful we might yield to the desires of the flesh and spoil our testimony. However, God is faithful and will give us a victorious Christian life if we adhere to verse 12 and also realize that in God's testing, God will always provide the escape or the strength to not fail in the temptation or test (v.13). None of us *has* to fail or faint in testing, for God is faithful. Paul speaks to us as spiritually intelligent persons (v.15). Therefore, may we be found feeding on spiritual food and drink, and not yielding to the temptations of the flesh.

vv.16-17: Verses 16-22 give us three circles — the altar of Israel, the Lord's table, and the table of demons. All Christians are at the Lord's table, *positionally*, as verse 17 tells us that "we *all* partake ...". None of us are at the altar of Israel and if Christians we *cannot* be partakers of the table of demons. So chapter 10 gives us the Lord's *table* where all believers are, with chapter 11:23-30 giving us the Lord's *supper* which is an expression of the Lord's table. Today, all believers do not partake of the Lord's supper because of their associations or because they have not acted on this privilege for whatever reason. Note that here, the cup of blessing comes first since the blood of Christ is the basis of Christian fellowship, whereas the bread which we break is the communion of the body of Christ, for all Christians are partakers. Evidently the expressions in verse 16, "the cup of blessing which we bless" and "the bread which we break," bring the Lord's supper before us, with chapter 11:22-30 giving us the order as given by the Lord Jesus in Luke 22, and that same order which was received by the Apostle Paul from Christ in the glory. "For I received from the Lord" (v.23) being instructions from above by divine revelation.

The cup of wine is a *sharing* or *fellowshipping* or a *communion* in the blood of Christ, and the bread which we break is a *sharing* in the body of Christ. The italicized words translate the Greek word *koinonia*, meaning "having in common, a *participation* in, fellowship." So the breaking of bread is an expression of *fellowship* or *communion*, having things in common, the expression of the "apostles' fellowship" (Acts 2:42). To many, if they share in salvation, that is enough. But Acts 2:42 shows that the "sharing" must include the apostles' doctrine. The "sharing" is not individual, but is intimately connected with the local assembly (1 Cor.1:1-2). *In fact, the breaking of bread is the outward expression of our fellowship together.*

"For we, though many, are one bread and one body, for we all partake of that one bread" (v.17). That loaf of bread on the table has a wider application than in the previous paragraph. It speaks of the *universal* body of Christ. Regardless of who will gather on God's True Ground, we are to have in mind 100% of God's dear people when we break bread locally. That one loaf, comprised of millions of tiny bits of flour, has become through intense heat applied, *one loaf*. By the Lord's suffering of untold agony as He bore our sins on the cross, and His death (Isa.53; 1 Pet.2:24), we all have been made *one* — one body. Although we are never to be narrow in our *thoughts*, this does not mean that the breaking of bread is open

to every member of the body of Christ without consideration of their doctrine, practice, moral condition and associations.

So the breaking of bread is the most intimate and holy expression of *participation in fellowship together* in the local assembly, and as we've said above, is seen in actual practice in the next chapter. The *oneness* of the body of Christ, the Assembly on earth at any one time, is pictured by the one loaf. When we see that one loaf we should never forget this oneness, regardless of outward failure in practice. The Lord willing, we will continue this in the next Messenger.

BC and RPD