

THE ASSEMBLY MESSENGER

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

Volume 01-44

Dear Reader

In this 44th newsletter we will continue our study of *Assembly Truth* in 1 Corinthians, looking particularly at chapter 11 which takes up headship and the Lord's supper. We will begin with chapter 10:18 where we left off in issue #42.

ASSEMBLY TRUTH IN 1 CORINTHIANS 10:18 to 12:10

vv.18-22: The question of *association* is an important feature of Chapter 10 because some of the Corinthians were visiting idols temples, and the Lord was provoked to jealousy (v.22). *Jealousy* in the Bible means wanting to maintain what is rightfully one's own; the opposite of *envy*. See Newsletter 21 on *associations defiling* and 1 Corinthians 8:4-6. Paul shows that there is a deep association with those with whom we break bread (v.16). The Word of God says, "Are not they who eat the sacrifice in *communion* (partner, partaker, fellowship) with the altar" (1 Cor.10:18). "I do not wish you to be in communion with demons. You cannot drink the Lord's cup and the cup of demons. You cannot partake of the Lord's table and the table of demons" (1 Cor.10:20-21).

In this dramatic illustration coming between the meaning of the Lord's Supper in chapter 10:16 and its practice in chapter 11:23-32, we see that we are *one* with those with whom we break bread. We thus are in fellowship with, deeply associated with, the *position* (altar) taken by those who break bread with us. God used a worst-case *example* to illustrate the point. An idol is just a formed piece of inanimate material, nothing in itself (v.19). *But demons are behind those idols*. So if one associates with things sacrificed to idols by simply *eating* of those sacrifices, he is seen as in fellowship with the idol's altar or position, and is associating himself with *demons* who are behind the idols, *even if he strongly repudiates what the idol stands for and would not want to have anything to do with demons* (v.20)! We are responsible for the position and beliefs of those with whom we break bread! Note that Paul is *not* calling wrong ecclesiastical positions of *Christians*, the tables of demons. That is only a dramatic *example* to illustrate the principle! But the Lord doesn't want us to be careless as to proper assembly fellowship. Through Paul He has given His will in these matters. And what Paul wrote are "the commandments of the Lord" (1 Cor.14:37).

Verse 21 refers to the Lord's *table*, as we touched on in the last issue. We believe every believer is at the Lord's table positionally, but no Christian can be at the table of demons. The breaking of bread, the Lord's *supper*, is an expression of the Lord's table.

vv.23-33. These verses give us guidelines as to daily eating and drinking, being one bread and one body, and being constantly at the Lord's table. These following points maintain God's rights and testimony among other people:

- Is it lawful (v.23)? Then you can eat and drink it
- Is it expedient or profitable or helpful (v.23)?
- Will it edify (build one up, spiritually)(v.23)?
- Am I seeking my own profit or the profit of others (v.24)?
- Am I concerned about the consciences of others (vv.24-25)?
- Am I disposed to go to a dinner or banquet with unbelievers? If so, eat, asking no questions for the sake of their conscience (v.27)
- If told the food was offered to idols, do not eat it as a testimony to others, for *their* conscience (vv.28-29)
- Is what I'm eating and drinking — or whatever I do — for the glory of God (vv.30-31)?
- Will it give offense (vv.32-33)?

What a book we have that even gives us guidance as to eating and drinking! Finally, the three categories of people that God recognizes are given in verse 32 — the Jew; the Gentile; *the Church of God*, comprised of *saved* Jews and Gentiles.

Chapter 11

We are to be followers or imitators of Paul *even as he was of Christ*. He was the great apostle to the Gentiles (Rom.11:13) and we need to imitate his manner of life *when that life was according to God's will*. We also need to follow his teachings which are so vital to our assembly life. He was chosen to complete the Word of God (Col.1:25), not as the last writer, but by bringing out God's final great truth, *the truth of the Assembly*.

vv.2-16: The truth and order of *headship* is here brought out. Christ is the *Head* of His Assembly (Col.1:18). *Headship* has the thoughts of direction, control and sustenance, all of which comes from the head. From this portion we get part of the reason for different roles of men and women in the assembly, and for the covered head and longer hair of the woman, and the uncovered head and shorter hair of the man. The doctrine of *headship* is vital, and it is interesting that God brings this out before giving the details as to the Lord's supper! In this portion we see:

- divine order (vv.3-6) — God, Christ, man, woman, [children — Eph.6:1; Col.3:20]
- creative order (vv.7-12) — woman from the man, created as man's unique and loving helper
- angelic order within creation (v.10) — angels learn as they see man and woman working out the roles and order assigned to them by God (Eph.3:10)
- order in nature (vv.11-15)
- assembly order (v.16) — no such custom in being contentious in the assemblies as to headship and gender roles: they were to obey.

vv.17-22: These verses show serious disorder in Corinth. The assembly was having a “love feast” before the breaking of bread, and some people were eating to excess while others were hungry, and some were even getting drunk. It showed the divisions, the party-spirit among them, and God allowed it to make manifest those He could approve of — those who were trying to stand for what was right (v.19). No wonder things had gotten so out-of-hand at Corinth! They were strongly rebuked for their sinful actions at this so-called “love feast.”

vv.23-26: The details as to the *practice* of the Lord's Supper are here given *by divine revelation* to Paul. This is a meeting unique to worshipping the *Lord Jesus* by eating the bread and drinking the cup of wine in remembrance of Him, showing His death till He comes. The Lord's supper is characteristic of the assembly, and Paul passes on the instructions he received by *revelation* from the Lord. He used the means of this letter to *deliver* these instructions to the Corinthians (v.23) and all other assemblies (1:1-2), and to tell them the *focus* of the “remembrance meeting” was the Lord Jesus during the night in which He was betrayed. We don't preach or evangelize at that meeting! We have *Him* before us!

Before going into the verses themselves, Bob gives us in outline-form the main features of the Lord's supper:

- Participation — “this do” (vv.23-25)
- Recollection — “in remembrance” (vv.24-25)
- Proclamation — “proclaim the Lord's death” (v.26)
- Continuation — “as often” (v.26; Acts 2:42)
- Anticipation — “till He comes” (v.26)
- Identification — Himself and His death (vv.27, 29)
- Examination or Approval — self-judgment (vv.28-31)
- Adoration — Lord Jesus (His Assembly name, v.23); Me (vv.24-25); the Lord (v.27)
- Condemnation — not with the world, by eating and drinking in a worthy manner, and by self-judgment (vv.28-34).

Now let's look at the verses themselves. “On the same night in which He was betrayed [delivered up, He] took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, Take, eat, This is My body which is broken [given] for you; do this in remembrance of Me. In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the

new covenant in My blood: this do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim [announce] the Lord's death *till He comes.*"

Whereas in Chapter 10 we had the behind-the-scenes meaning of breaking bread, here we have the up-front meaning. The breaking of bread is a *remembrance* of the Lord — a "recalling of Me to mind" states a note in the JND Bible. It specially takes in the time and events of "the night in which He was delivered up," and specially His crucifixion when He "bore our sins in His own body on the tree" (1 Pet.2:24), and died. The loaf speaks of, is a *picture* of, His body which was willingly and in great love "given" for us (Eph.5:25-27). We can't understand how much He suffered in His body to satisfy a holy God as to our sins, but we certainly appreciate it! He satisfied a holy, sin-hating God. He was the *propitiation* (a God-satisfying sacrifice and Substitute) for our sins (1 Jn.2:2). Every *believer* can truly say He bore *my* sins (1 Pet.2:24). No unsaved person can say that, although the sacrifice of Christ was *sufficient* for all (1 Jn.2:2).

Furthermore, His blood was shed (poured out), His life given up. All depends on the death of the Lord Jesus Christ, on His blood shed, and the cup of wine pictures that fact. All those animal sacrifices in Israel's history only looked forward to the cross. And *our* sins are fully forgiven based on that same shed blood. We are blessed by the same blessing that Israel will in the future enjoy when their "new covenant" is in force — the fact that the blood of the Lord Jesus was poured out at Calvary. How much there is to remember of Him and His work!

The breaking of bread as such doesn't go beyond the remembrance of the Lord *in relation to His death*. We now know Him as a risen and glorified Man in heaven, but we *remember* Him primarily at the cross, in relation to His death — a fact we need to remember in the prayers we pray and the hymns we give out at the breaking of bread. In this remembrance we announce or preach or proclaim the Lord's death *until He comes*. It is a testimony to all who see it. The time is coming when this remembrance will cease because we then will be with Him.

Note also that the breaking of bread is a remembrance of *Him* — of the Lord Jesus. It's *not* a remembrance of the Father or of the Holy Spirit. Certainly not of us! Neither is it a remembrance of His remarkable life or any other *event*. It's not a gospel or prayer meeting (we don't *ask* for *our* needs; we *tell Him* of our thoughts concerning *Himself*); nor is it for teaching. *Priesthood*, not gift, is evident. The hymns sung, our words of praise and worship, the Scriptures read, all should have a narrow focus of having *Him* before us, as led by the Holy Spirit, in relation to the night in which He was betrayed — those unique few hours from the Garden to the Tomb. We do not wish to limit in any way the Holy Spirit, but the above appears to be the general force of Scripture. Check it for yourself!

vv.27-30: Here we have a serious warning. "Therefore, whosoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord *in an unworthy manner* will be guilty of [in respect to, JND] the body and blood of the Lord For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks *judgment* to himself, not discerning the Lord's body." The previously-discussed abuses at Corinth in their "love feast" before the Lord's Supper led to God's judgment on many, including weakness, sickness and even premature death (v.30). The Lord has not laid out all the ways we can eat and drink in an unworthy manner, but it is a serious matter and we need to have right conduct and thoughts concerning these things. If I come before the Lord to remember Him with any unconfessed sin, any hatred of my brethren in Christ for whom Christ suffered and died because He loves them, any known disobedience to His Word, any wrong attitude, any plans that leave God out of the equation, I'm asking for trouble! *This is very serious!* We probably don't realize how much grief we may have caused ourselves by not carefully heeding this warning! See Luke 12:48. The next paragraph details the inspired solution to this serious problem.

v.28: "Let a man *prove* [Gk: *dokimazo*, meaning *approval after testing*, as with the testing of metals, Vine] himself and thus eat of the bread and drink of the cup." If there is sin in the believer's life, he or she is not to neglect to break bread, but rather, *do what is necessary get approved before God and then eat as had been the previous practice*. The word *prove* or *approve* carries us two steps beyond the word *examine* used in the KJV, NKJV and NASB. First, I am to *examine* myself before God by the light of Scripture. Secondly, if I find sin, I am to judge it and correct the situation, and thus be *approved*. *Then I am to eat*. I'm not to stay away because of hurt feelings or dislike of another person, etc., but continue to remember the Lord *as had been my previous practice!* This and surrounding verses leave no room for long-term grudges or sinful practices.

In the last Newsletter we saw something of this approval process in chapter 5:7-8. During the whole week, each of us should be in the value of the Passover (5:7) and figuratively should “keep the feast” of unleavened bread (5:8) since any “leaven” (sin) will hinder our fellowship with the Lord. In Israel, all leaven, *a picture of sin*, was put out of their houses for seven days (a week) after they ate the Passover (Ex.12:15-20). “Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us” (1 Cor.5:7). When we come to remember Him, we should come “approved” 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. How it would purify us! It seemed appropriate to repeat the above here, since it is so important and so neglected.

Verse 28 is wrongly used by many. An argument for any-Christian *reception* is wrongly read into it! But there is not one word about *reception*. What we have here is the responsibility of each believer who is *already* breaking bread to personally and weekly *approve* himself or herself before partaking of the bread and wine. The chapter was written, not to individuals, but to the Corinthian assembly. The *assembly* was told what was the personal responsibility of each one in fellowship there, and what might be the consequences if that responsibility was treated in a careless manner. Although this verse has absolutely nothing to do with reception, it has everything to do with a happy and healthy Christian life.

vv.31-33: *Self-judgment* is what is called for; the alternate is *God's chastening* as in Hebrews 12:5-13. God will not have a bad testimony and thus will *child-train* us as needed! But what we were careless about last week doesn't have to happen next week! Finally there were less-serious matters in the Corinthian assembly that still had to be set right, and Paul, with apostolic authority, planned to do that personally, as he also said in 2 Corinthians 13:1-3, 10.

Chapter 12

vv.1-6: This chapter's theme is “spiritual gifts” (v.1) or “spiritual *manifestations*” (JND) — that which is produced as a result of the gift. Christ has received gifts from God for men (Ps.68:18) and He gives the gifts by the Holy Spirit who distributes them severally as He wills. *Gift* is a spiritual ability beyond what is natural to man. There are “diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit” (v.4). These *charisma* (gifts involving grace or favor) are used as directed by the Holy Spirit. “There are differences of ministries (services) but the same *Lord*” (v.5). The *Lord* gives direction and controls the service of each believer's spiritual manifestation to fulfill His ultimate purpose. “And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same *God* who works all in all” (v.6). To meet the many needs, many “activities” are needed as directed by God. God is in charge of what we do: He spiritually exercises us to do certain things. So the entire Trinity is involved in the spiritual operations of the members of the Church of God. Many of these gifts are used *in connection with* the assembly, but when the local assembly is “*in assembly*,” gifts are hidden, but the Holy Spirit (as we shall see) uses whomsoever He wills to perform the functions He wants performed.

vv.7-10: The “manifestation of the Spirit is given *to each one* (not to a few select clergymen) for the profit of all” (v.7). The Holy Spirit sovereignly operates in the life of every Christian so the power He gives can be used to the profit of those who are touched by the person's service. The Holy Spirit doesn't look on the outward appearance or the eloquence of the natural man, but on the gift or manifestation He gives — an ability that makes each of us a potential powerhouse in serving our Lord. I say *potential* because we may fail to use what He has given us; in fact, the almost-universal clergy-laity system *discourages* the use by the *laity* — what most of us would be if we were in the denominational systems — of at least the full manifestation of many gifts. The *system* replaces the Holy Spirit as director of gifts, and the *system* tends to limit the widespread use of gift, making human ordination, seminary training, and often human vote the deciding factor in who will pray, preach and worship.

Some have a divinely-given “word of wisdom.” They have a unique ability to use knowledge aright. They, if walking close to the Lord, are uniquely balanced in what they say and do. Others have “a word of knowledge through the same Spirit.” Such have a divinely-given knowledge of what Scripture says and are able to express it in a most helpful way as needed. Others have *faith* to step out and act for God when perhaps most are too timid, too afraid of the unknown.

Then in verses 9-10 we have a number of gifts or manifestations of the Spirit which were for the early Church to authenticate the Word of God and those who carried the message. We believe those so-called “sign gifts” have run

their course (13:8). “Tongues shall cease” (Greek *pauo* = come to an end). God *does* divinely heal when it is His will, but there are no longer *people* with the spiritual gift (charisma) of healing. But there are *satanic imitations* of that gift by self-serving people. Note that even the Apostle Paul could no longer heal near the end of his life: he left a dear friend sick at Miletus (2 Tim.4:20). Neither are there people with the *gift* of miracles, although again, God can and does work miracles today. *Prophecy* is telling-forth God’s Word which meets a particular need at a particular time. God gave some the gift of *discerning the spirits* — if they were of God or of Satan. Others had the gift of *tongues*; others could translate tongues. In Scripture *tongues* are *always* a foreign language. We will see this in more detail in chapter 14.

We will begin the next Newsletter with verse 11 of chapter 12, the Lord willing.