

THE ASSEMBLY MESSENGER

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

Volume 01-53

Dear Younger Reader,

We will continue our answer to questions 3,7,14, beginning with some remarks on 1 Corinthians 10. This chapter gets into the deeper meanings of breaking bread. God doesn't expect us to skim off the surface truth and ignore what is deeper. It's all part of His Word for our instruction. "All Scripture ... is profitable for doctrine ... instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim.3:16). It's an important portion for the proper understanding of assembly truth.

1 Corinthians 10:16-22

The breaking of bread is more than simply a remembrance of the Lord, as important as that is! "The cup of blessing which *we* bless, is it not the *communion* [fellowship] of the blood of Christ? The bread which *we* break, is it not the *communion* of the body of Christ? Because *we*, being many, are one loaf, one body; for *we* all partake of the one loaf" (vv.16-17, JND). The term *communion service* comes from these verses. Note here that the cup comes first since this chapter gives the spiritual meaning of the supper, not its order to be carried out (which we have in chapter 11), and the blood of Christ is the basis for all Christian fellowship. By breaking bread, *we* — the assembly, the Christian company — have fellowship in the blood and body of Christ. So the breaking of bread is the act that really defines outwardly our fellowship together with the Lord.

Further, "we being many" are looked at as one body, not now the physical body of Christ, but the Church as the body of Christ. When we collectively partake of that loaf, even though we are only a small part of the whole body, we are to remember that the one loaf is comprised of many thousands of little pieces of flour, etc., but made *one* loaf, *one* bread, by the intensity of the fire in the baking process. The reality of the picture of the one loaf is that Christ has made the body of Christ, the Church, comprised of thousands of individuals, *one* by His intense suffering and death on the cross. That is an absolute reality from the divine side, an absolute truth, that we are *never* to forget, not even in today's *outwardly* divided Church. It is *God's* answer to the Lord's prayer in John Paul uses the *example* of idols in verses 19-22. An idol is nothing — just a dead image of gold or wood or stone. But behind every idol is a *demon*: it's how they get unsuspecting worshippers. So an assembly obviously couldn't associate itself with an idol or one who

17:11,21 (which is very often misinterpreted even by those who should know better, as something *we* have to do to make or force a oneness by compromise, giving up doctrine as a divinely-ordained dividing point, and otherwise becoming ecumenical in belief). Wrong, wrong!

Exclusion from Breaking Bread; The Impact of Associations

Should every professed Christian be admitted to this privilege of breaking bread? Many think so. But unjudged *moral* sin excludes from assembly fellowship (1 Cor.5). One man (at that time) was to be "put away" from all the privileges of the Corinthian local assembly and from all assemblies gathered to the Lord's name — "from among yourselves" (1 Cor.5:13). We don't have to go beyond Galatians 5:9 and 2 Timothy 2 to see that *doctrinal* sin also excludes. 1 Corinthians 10 also explains the seriousness of *associational* sin. "See Israel according to the flesh: are not they who eat the sacrifices in communion with the altar?" (v.18, JND). Israel is used as an *example* of the need for care as to who breaks bread and thus becomes associated with the local assembly and all assemblies gathered on the same ground. The *altar* in the Old Testament stood for the *religious position* of the congregation which sacrificed on it. There was the altar of the Lord; there were altars to Baal and other heathen gods (1 Ki.18, etc). Those who worshiped at those altars were held responsible for the position represented by the altar. When I break bread I am taking the position of that assembly and those assemblies with which I break bread! I am responsible before God to break bread with those who are doing things according to His directions, and nowhere else! *I am deeply associated with the ecclesiastical (church) position of those with whom I break bread!* Should I break bread where I do not agree with the position of that gathering? It would associate me with a position I don't agree with, and associate that assembly with a person who believes in a position *it* does not believe to be scriptural. *It would be utter confusion!*

sacrifices to idols, because the idol's *position*, what it stands for, is dead wrong! By what an assembly associates itself with, it can provoke the Lord to *jealousy*. We often equate *jealousy* with *envy*, but wrongly! *Jealousy* is a strong desire to maintain what is *already*

one's own, and that generally is a right thing to do! The holiness of the Lord's Assembly is something He jealously maintains! So when we break bread with those who maintain a wrong position, a position not found in God's Word, we provoke the Lord to jealousy, for we are infringing on His rights to maintain the holiness of His house. Please note we are *not* saying that the unscriptural religious positions around us are equal to sacrificing to demons. That is just an *example* to get our attention, to help explain the principle, to help us understand the seriousness of wrong ecclesiastical associations.

The doctrine of associations-defiling is found throughout Scripture in such portions as Joshua 7 (Achan); Leviticus 21:16-24; Ezra 2:61-63; Haggai 2:11-13; 1 Corinthians 5:6; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; Galatians 5:9; 2 Timothy 2:19-22; and 2 John 9-11. This is a study in itself which I leave to you to do, except for a couple of examples. Joshua 7 is a strong example. One man sinned, but all Israel was accounted as having sinned *by association* until Achan was judged, and many died due to that association. God said, "*Israel* has sinned" (Josh.7:11). Thus many who want to receive all professed Christians regardless of their religious associations attempt to reinterpret and discredit this passage. 2 John 9-11 also has been greatly attacked or made only to apply to an unsaved man like a Jehovah's Witness who comes with false doctrine. But when we see the *principle of associations* in these verses, it does not matter who comes with the false doctrine. The point is, that if a Christian even greets him — even if clearly not agreeing at all with the false doctrine — he is seen *by association* as a "*partaker* in his evil works" (2 Jn.11, JND). Many deny religious/ ecclesiastical/doctrinal association as a bar to breaking bread, but we believe the *principle* found in both the Old and New Testament scriptures makes it clear that it *is* a bar! God insists on holiness in His house! Right and wrong shouldn't exist together (2 Cor.6:14).

So the simple act of taking a little piece of bread and sipping a little wine has far-reaching impact. But it is clear that the Lord expects each of His own to take his or her place at the Lord's supper, identifying with an assembly meeting on scriptural ground, and having a personal and assembly life that does not interfere with breaking bread honestly before the Lord. If so, although the Lord may allow testing and hasn't promised health and prosperity, it will be a life-long blessing. We trust this long answer to a somewhat complicated subject has been helpful and reasonably clear.

QUESTION 18: LETTERS OF COMMENDATION

We have seen enough in the answers to these questions to realize that not just anyone should be able to walk into the meetings of the assembly and break bread or otherwise take part in the privileges of assembly life. God requires those walking together to have a certain holiness of life and doctrine. Therefore, when the early believers traveled they took a *letter of commendation* with them to introduce them as ones in fellowship in a distant assembly and to ask for their care. Sister Phoebe from Cenchrea (near Corinth in Greece) had such a letter when she traveled to Rome: in fact Romans 16 *was* that letter (Rom.16:1-2)! Paul didn't need such a letter since he was well known, but others did (2 Cor.3:1). So if we travel where we are not well known as one in fellowship, breaking bread, we get a letter from our assembly which introduces us and commends us to the love and care of the assembly..

QUESTION 17: CHRISTIAN GIVING: FUNDING THE LORD'S WORK

This is a question that could take pages to answer because there are many verses which deal with funding the Lord's work. But we'll give the short answer. "Let him who is *taught* the Word share in all good things with him who *teaches*" (Gal.6:6). This verse is not to be taken separate from the fact that *the teacher should be teaching and walking as Paul walked*. But when the teacher's walk and what he teaches is right, then there is to be a payback for that "labor" in the Lord's things. It might not be money, but could be giving of time, ability, energy, etc. to help meet the teacher's needs. Is this important? See what the Lord says regarding giving. "God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows that he will also reap" (Gal.6:7-8). This financial responsibility also applies for the godly and called evangelist and shepherd (pastor), for "the laborer is worthy of his wages" (1 Tim.5:18). And at least one way such funding is collected is when the believers gather together on the first day of the week (1 Cor.16:1-2). Hebrews 13:16 indicates that giving is a form of praise.

QUESTIONS 9,12: PROBLEMS IN AN ASSEMBLY

Unfortunately, Christians don't always act as they should. Satan particularly loves to disrupt the harmony of assembly life or to bring in wrong doctrine and sinful conduct. To many, sin in the local assembly is a very unpleasant topic which they would like to ignore ... and many do ignore it! But think of your home. You would be very displeased if some person, knowing your standards of conduct, came into your house and conducted himself or herself in ways that did not meet those standards. The person would likely be spoken to,

and if the conduct persisted, asked to leave. Without *discipline* to maintain godly order, the local assembly

Paul said, “I write so that you may know how *you ought to conduct yourself* in the house of God, which is the Church of the Living God” (1 Tim.3:15). Proper conduct or behavior is His house, His Church, is very important to God, and He has very definite rules of conduct that fit His holiness. Paul was particularly commissioned (Eph.3) to put down in writing what that conduct should be and how it should be enforced, and such proper conduct is found particularly in Paul’s writings from Romans through Titus (as well as in a few other portions of Scripture by other writers).

Discipline in the Early Church

The early Church grew rapidly, with thousands being saved and added together in a matter of weeks. There was great love for the Lord and for the fellow-believers (Acts 2-4). But a greedy Christian husband and wife had a little scheme. They would pretend to give all the money from the sale of some property to the Lord’s work, but in reality keep back some for themselves (Acts 5:1-4). By today’s standards we would not think it a very serious sin, but God demands *righteousness* (simply what is right before God) from His people, not just freedom from what we think are *major* sins. God judged by a different standard than we might have judged by, and caused Ananias and Sapphira, although Christians in the Jerusalem assembly, to die on the spot (5:5-10). That was perfect divine discipline, not an over-reaction! God never over-reacts! What was the result? “So *great fear* came upon all the Church and upon all who heard these things” (v.11). Evidently many sins were prevented. The effect was also long lasting, at least until Paul had transmitted God’s instructions for assembly discipline by means of his epistles (letters), beginning about 25 years later.

God can still act behind the scenes in discipline apart from the action of the local assembly. But, today, since Paul’s writings, God requires the *assembly* to act against known sin in its midst! In Corinth there was disorder at the breaking of bread (1 Cor.11:17-29). God had *already* acted in discipline against this disorder, and it would appear the Corinthian brethren didn’t even realize it! For this cause “many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves we would not be judged. But when we are judged we are *chastened* by the Lord” (1 Cor.11:30-32). 1 John 5:16-17 tells us that “there is a sin leading to death.” God is the judge here. My father knew a middle-aged Christian man who was sick. He said the Lord had showed him he had

would become the incubator for every sin that Satan could place in its midst.

sinned a sin unto death, and he asked that no one pray for him. And he died shortly thereafter.

Personal Problems Between Believers

Personal problems often have a devastating effect on assembly life, and Matthew 18:15-18 is the scriptural process for dealing with it. The process is self-evident, so we will not speak of it further. But we should not neglect the process: it is *God’s* process which is given as a *command* to use it. Why then do so many refuse or neglect to do so, with resulting great harm among believers?

A Believer Falls Into Moral Sin, Known to the Assembly

The word *moral*, although often associated with sexual misconduct, simply has the thought of being right or wrong in *any* conduct. It is a broad term. The assembly’s course of action depends on how far the sin has progressed. The first form of discipline is the *admonition or rebuke of the assembly*, with pastoral care and ministry. “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual, *restore* such a one in a spirit of gentleness” (Gal.6:1). “We exhort you, brethren, warn (admonish) those who are unruly” (1 Thes.5:14). Every reasonable attempt is made to bring restoration. The sinning person is warned of serious consequences to follow.

If the above fails, the next step is to withdraw from, *avoid* the disorderly one. The brethren show their strong disapproval by having nothing to do with the sinning one on a social basis or in *outward* fellowship in the assembly. “We command you ... that you *withdraw* from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition (instructions) which he received from us” (2 Thes.3:6). The Greek word for *withdraw* is *stello* and means to shrink from a person, to avoid him. A few verses later the same thought is expressed, “If anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, note that person and *do not keep company with him*, that he may be ashamed. Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother” (vv.14-15). The goal is still restoration, and by cutting off all social fellowship in love, the person is made to feel his sin more deeply.

If a suitable time of labor has not produced repentance, then the sin has definitely become a *course*. See 2 Corinthians 12:21 and 13:1-2. The sinning brother is

leprous (Lev.13). Or the sin may be so serious and so well established that an assembly action in *excommunication* (putting the person away from any assembly fellowship) should take place quickly, as with the case of the sexually immoral man in 1 Corinthians 5:3-5, 13. The person is still a Christian. But he is put outside of the place of blessing found in the practical In this same sad fifth chapter God gives us the basic principle as to why such assembly action is necessary. “A little leaven leavens the whole lump” (5:6). Just as leaven (yeast) will spread as a permeating influence through bread dough until the whole loaf is leavened, sin allowed to go on unjudged in the assembly will spread till the whole assembly is leavened with similar sin. The action of leaven is only stopped by heat; the action of a sinning Christian is only stopped by the heat of assembly action in discipline. It is a matter of maintaining the holiness of the Lord’s Assembly, the order of His house. Only by the action of excommunication was the Corinthian local assembly purified (2 Cor.7:11-12) — “cleared in this matter” of the sexually immoral man. And the sinning man also was restored, praise God! The discipline and excommunication had its desired effect (2 Cor.2:6-9). The prodigal had returned and it was time for rejoicing.

A Believer Teaches Doctrinal Error

As asked in Question 12, there was internal strife or factions in Corinth over who was their favorite speaker/person (1 Cor.1:10-13). Paul besought them to be of one mind. Something that small, allowed to continue, can lead to all kinds of doctrinal error (as well as many ill feelings). Having favorite speakers or only listening to (heeding) certain people was denying the varied spiritual gifts that God had given, *all* of whom were important and worthwhile listening to. So *any* doctrinal error is serious! Seek diligently the whole truth of Scripture!

We saw that the guiding principle for assembly action against moral sin was that “a little leaven (sin) leavens the whole lump” — the whole assembly. *The exact same words are used in Galatians 5:9 for doctrinal sin.* Did the sin seen in Galatians deny the deity of Christ or the existence of the Holy Spirit, or similar sins we might call *fundamental* error? No, the people were simply teaching that one had to keep the Law of Moses. So what, it might be argued, if some Christian wants to, or believes he must do something like trying to keep the Law to be saved or to continue in favor with God? If he has trusted Christ as Savior, he’s going to heaven anyway. But Paul by inspiration said such doctrine was *leaven* of the kind that would corrupt the whole assembly! It was *not* the

fellowship of the believers walking according to the apostles’ doctrine! He is put into Satan’s territory for the destruction of the flesh (5:5). *Destruction* has the thought of making it ineffective. He needs to learn that in him, in his flesh, his old nature, “nothing good dwells” (Rom.7:18).

“apostles’ doctrine” (Acts 2:42)! The truth as to such doctrines is not optional: they are deemed by God to be vitally important to Christianity! From the course of action given in 1 Corinthians 5 we learn that serious doctrinal sin *must* be stopped by the disciplinary action of the assembly, including, if eventually necessary, excommunication. Sadly, many Christian groups don’t take most doctrinal error seriously, so almost anything goes in their midst. Many books by currently-popular Christian writers are full of serious doctrinal error. Be careful!

Some in Corinth were saying (*teaching*: usually a systematic and set discourse — Strongs #3004) “that there is no resurrection of the dead” (1 Cor.15:12). According to 2 Timothy 2:17-18 this type of doctrine, taught with a variation by Hymenaeus and Philetus, will spread like a cancer: it is *leaven* and must be stopped. The doctrines of Scripture stand or fall together! Attacking one doctrine has a serious effect on all! For example, denial of the divinely-given order of God’s house, as is almost universally denied today at least in practice (*the leaven has spread!*), is *not* conducting oneself properly as to His house, as 1 Timothy 3:15 insists on. It is a serious attack on the very foundations of the Church, the Lord’s special interest today. The course of action for a godly local assembly would be similar to that which we studied under moral sin.

It has become popular to so *humanize* the Lord Jesus that many false doctrines concerning His Person and work (such as He could have sinned when on earth, and that He had a struggle as to whether or not to obey the Father and go to the cross) are almost “standard equipment” in Christian groups today. Such false teaching is virtually put in a special category in 2 John 9-11. The *example* refers to unsaved imposters who come to your home, bringing their false doctrine. They are not to be even greeted! But does that mean it’s OK for a *Christian* to bring such false doctrine to the meetings of the local assembly? Of course not! The *principle* behind these verses is that God has a special interest in maintaining the Scriptural doctrine of Christ! The assembly cannot have or maintain fellowship, or be associated with false *teachings* about Christ or the Father or the Holy Spirit (as in the Charismatic Movement where unscriptural things are attributed to the Holy Spirit), or with the false

teachers themselves! We trust this has given you enough information to be comfortable with the need for discipline in the assembly, even though it adds sadness and unpleasantness to many hearts.

A *heretic* (Tit.1:10) is not one who simply teaches a false doctrine, but one who makes an *unscriptural* party or sect for himself (Rom.16:17), and that usually involves some doctrinal matters. The party-making is wrong, and often or usually, so is the doctrinal error or over-emphasis on one particular doctrine. Such heretics are called “deceivers” (Tit.1:10), which could be both in a doctrinal Note: Near the end of #47 we said the disciples only knew Hebrew. They probably only knew Aramaic.

and/or moral sense. Their “mouths must be stopped” (v.11) — akin to avoiding or withdrawing from them. They are not to be allowed to teach anyone their false and/or divisive ways. No one is to listen to them. They are to be *rejected* (Gk: *paraiteomai* — to beg off, ask to be excused, refused — Vine). They are to be “rebuked sharply” (v.13). If that doesn’t stop their sin, then we have already seen the assembly’s final responsibility to act in excommunication against a course of sin after every reasonable attempt has been made to stop it.

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