**The Church at Corinth**

**A Church Facing Inner Problems – #30**

**Abuses of the Lord’s Supper – 1 Corinthians 10:14-22**

**1 Corinthians 10**

***14*** *Therefore, my dear friends flee from idolatry.* ***15*** *I am speaking as to wise people; judge for yourselves what I am saying.* ***16*** *Is not the cup of blessing that we bless a participation in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?* ***17*** *Because there is one loaf, we, though many, are one body, for we all par take of the one loaf.* ***18*** *Consider the people of Israel. Are not those who eat the sacrifices participants in the altar?* ***19*** *What then am I saying? That meat sacrificed to idols is something? Or that an idol is something?* ***20*** *Rather, what they sacrifice [they sacrifice] to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to become partners of the demons.* ***21*** *You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons as well; you cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons.* ***22*** *Or are we stirring the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than he?*

**Be Wise and Sensible**

**VERSE 15 –** *I am speaking as to wise people; judge for yourselves what I am saying.*

Christians who “possess knowledge” still can learn from what happened to their “ancestors” and judge the kind of freedom that allows them freely to take part in pagan temple banquets, to reflect with him on the relation of eating such idol meat to their eating with the rest of the community at the table of the Lord. Social conduct must be guided by Christian faith. Paul begins his discussion with a reference to himself, as he did in (1:12; 6:5; 7:6, 8). Appealing to what is, “wise, sensible,” Paul is being realistic. Here is past history let us all learn and recognize the correctness of his counsel.

**We All Bless the Cup**

**VERSE 16 –** *Is not the cup of blessing that we bless a participation in the blood of Christ?*

*- (or,* “*a communion with”)*

*- (or, see, RSV marginal note 1 Cor. 11:26), “so do [we] not share in the life-blood of the crucified Christ, when we partake together of the cup of his death?”*

In drinking from that cup we partake of Christ’s blood and share in his death, the shedding of that blood. Paul’s question is intended to recall the Christian celebration of the Lord’s Supper as a criterion for judging other meals, especially those involving idol meat.

“*The cup of blessing*” is an expression apparently derived from the Jewish Passover meal. In the Jewish Passover there are four cups and please note that the Hebrew names don’t correspond to the commonly used words such as blessing and judgment.

According to the Mishnah four cups must be shared (Passover 10:1): even the poor are obliged to drink the four cups. Each cup is imbibed at a specific point in the Seder. The first is for [**Kiddush**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kiddush) (**קידוש**) blessing and also sanctification, the the second is for [**Maggid**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maggid) (**מגיד**) teacher, the third is for [**Birkat Hamazon**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Birkat_Hamazon) (**ברכת המזון**) Blessing for the food) and the fourth is for [**Hallel**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hallel)(**הלל praise**).‎

The 4 cups are:

1. I will bring out
2. I will deliver
3. I will redeem
4. I will do

(Note – compare Exodus 6:6-7)

**The Cup**

In his account of the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 11:25), Paul will refer to “the cup after the supper”, which may be the same. There Paul does not cite a liturgical formula with the Greek verb ***eulogein***, “bless,” nor does Luke in his similar narrative (22:20); and both Mark (14:23) and Matthew (26:27) have the verb ***eucharistein***, “give thanks” (cf. Luke 22:17). In Hebrew or Aramaic “blessing” and “giving thanks” are the same. The phrase does not mean that the cup brings a blessing; it is rather the cup over which one pronounces a blessing as (Mark 8:7).

What the cup of blessing brings in the Lord’s Supper is the “communal participation” or “sharing” in the blood of Jesus Christ. If we look at the OT background of the Passover there was no room for any symbolic participation. The promise of deliverance and redemption is real and is a divine action not words.

So we can say that Christians who partake of the Lord’s Supper are “united with the Lord’s redeeming action.” We have to remember that “life” and “blood” are not two different items, for this is made clear in Leviticus 17:11: “*the life-principle of the flesh is in the blood*” and “*for the life-principle of all flesh in its blood.*” The participation means a communal sharing in the life-blood of Christ (compare Lev 17:14). Paul is presenting a primitive Christian tradition, which will emerge more clearly in chapter 11.

**The Bread**

**VERSE 16 (cont.) –** *Is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?* - Or “*a communion with*” (see RSV marginal note).

Breaking bread was a common expression for sharing a meal with a friend (Mark 8:6, 19), but the expression for sharing the Lord’s Supper. Now, however, Paul uses it as an expression parallel to “*the cup of blessing that we bless*.” As that cup was “a participation in” or “communion with” the blood of Christ, so the bread is a participation in or communion with the body of Christ. This, however, also implies a common sharing with one another in this body and blood of Christ, as verse 17 makes clear. The KJV translated this as “communion,” and this rendering provided English-speaking Christians with the biblical basis for the term “Holy Communion,” what is also called the Eucharist.

The Greek word ***artos*** would normally denote ordinary bread, but it was used also for unleavened bread, such as would be eaten at a Passover meal.

**The Body of Christ**

In Greek, ***to soma tou Christou*** means “the Body of Christ” and is used in three different senses in Pauline writings:

1. Literally is used for the historical body of Christ crucified (Rom 7:4)

2. The church the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27), which is explicitly mentioned 1 Corinthians 2: 28 (cf. Ephesians 4:12).

3. The body of Christ in the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 10:16; 11:27).

**Are These Three Different Bodies?**

1. By no means for Christ had, and still has, one body.

2. Early on, when dealing with the division in the church of Corinth, Paul says that Christ could not be divided (1 Cor 1:13), for Christ has one life and one salvation to give us.

3. So, is this a riddle that we have to solve? No, it is not because there is a corporate life that contains all of us. The old life is that of Adam, and the new one is that of Christ. Paul says that briefly in 1 Corinthians 15:22, “*For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive*.”

**The Lord’s Supper and the Unity of the Church**

1. This section of scripture (1 Cor 10:15ff) teaches one important doctrine that we have to look at carefully. The Lord’s Supper is Paul’s argument against Christians taking part in meals in pagan temples and consuming meat sacrificed to idols. Paul says that participation in the cup and bread brings unity of the whole church.
2. Then in 10:18-21 Paul draws a parallel between Christian participation in the Lord’s Table (10:16-17) and the participation of Jews in the sacrifices (10:18) and pagans worship of demons (10:19-20). In all these three are participation in the sacrifices and in meals. There is a good parallel that exists between Paul and one of the oldest Christian documents ever known to us, the Didache (DID-ah-kee), which reveals that a sense of unity of the believers and the Lord was dominant. For example:

(From the Didache, 9:1-8)

“… but as touching the Eucharistic thanksgiving give ye thanks thus.

First, as regards the cup: We give you thanks, O our Father, for the holy vine of your son David, which Thou made known unto us through your Son Jesus; Yours is the glory for ever and ever.

Then as regards the broken bread: We give you thanks, O our Father, for the life and knowledge which You did make known unto us through your Son Jesus;

Yours is the glory for ever and ever.”

We have to read carefully the next words:

“As this broken bread was scattered upon the mountains and being gathered together became one, so may your Church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into your kingdom; for Yours is the glory and the power through Jesus Christ for ever and ever.” (Didache 9:9-10).

**Later Witness: There Is Only One Body**

“The body of Christ is not many bodies but one body. For just as the bread, which consists of many grains, is made “one” to the point that the separate grains are no longer visible, even though they are still there, so we are joined to each other and to Christ. But if we are all nourished by the same source and become one with him, why do we not also show forth the same love and become one in this respect too? This was what it was like in ancient times, as we see in Acts 4:32: “For the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul.”

John Chrysostom

Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians 24.4.

“So by bread you are instructed as to how you ought to cherish unity. Was that bread made of one grain of wheat? Were there not, rather, many grains? However, before they became bread, these grains were separate. They were joined together in water after a certain amount of crushing. For, unless the grain is ground and moistened with water, it cannot arrive at that form which is called bread. So, too, you were previously ground, as it were, by the humiliation of your fasting and by the sacrament of exorcism. Then came the baptism of water. You were moistened, as it were, so as to arrive at the form of bread. But without fire, bread does not yet exist.”

Augustine,

Easter Sermon 227

**One Loaf and One Body**

**VERSE 17 –** *Because there is one loaf, we, though many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.*

Paul has written: because we are “one bread,” partaking of it together makes us “one.”

1. The action unifies us.

The one loaf is the reality that we see and that has to be in our awareness that we are called to be one.

We are many and diverse, but we are united in this union with Christ through sharing in the one bread.

The “one body” is the one life just like the one “flesh” in the marriage union. When we share in consuming that one loaf to unity in and with Christ, we realize that the act of sharing with one another in that one loaf brings about our unity with the risen Lord.

2. Jesus shared our humanity and became like us in all things. Thus this sharing in “one body” where the Bread is a form of food for life brings about our union in and through the life of Christ himself.

3. “One body” has been a term used throughout the letters of Paul as a definition of the unity of the church as in (1 Cor 12:13; Rom 12:5; cf. Col 3:15; Eph 2:16; 4:4; and even without the adjective “one” in (Col 1:18, 24; Eph 1:23; 5:23, 30).

**Example from the Past**

**VERSE 18 –** *Consider the people of Israel.*

Literally “Look at Israel according to the flesh.”

Paul puts forward old Israel as an example to learn from.

**VERSE 18 (cont.) –** *Are not those who eat of the sacrifices participants in the altar?* That is, the partners, the sharers in the altar. When the Israelites offered their sacrifices and partook of them (Deut 12:6-7; 14:26; Lev 3:1-17; 7:11-36; 10:12-15; 1 Sam 9:12-13), they in effect made it their offering and they themselves are bonded with what was offered on the altar of sacrifice and with the Lord. (See, R. de Vaux, *Studies in the Sacrifices*, 32: “the victim is immolated . . . it is shared between God, the Priest, and the Offerer”), so Paul uses the OT itself to point to the fact that in the OT, Israelite worshipers made them “participants of the altar.” The function of the altar in the OT worship of Israel is that the worshippers and the sacrifices are united to God by their act of worship.

**VERSE 19 –** *What then am I saying? That meat sacrificed to idols is something? Or that an idol is something?*

The meaning is that the piece of meat is only a piece of meat, so also the idol is no more, in reality, than the wood, metal, or stone out of which it has been made – it is an image of a “god” that does not really exist. But the next verse is the most important one for it points to the dark side of paganism.

**VERSE 20 –** *Rather what they sacrifice [they sacrifice] to demons and not to God.* According to Deuteronomy 32:17, “*they [rebellious Israelites] sacrificed to demons [Canaanite deities] and not to God, to gods whom they knew not*” (see also Psalm 106:28, LXX).

“This is the reason why we should not eat food which has been sacrificed to idols. The uncleanness is not in the food but in the intentions of the sacrifices and the attitude of the receivers.”

- John Chrysostom Homilies on the Epistles of Paul to the Corinthians 24.5

**Demons**

This name is used often in the LXX for evil spirits (Deut 32:17; Ps 91:6).

**VERSE 21 –** *You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons as well*.

If Christians understand that participation in the Lord’s Supper really means sharing life and death and resurrection of Christ, then sharing a cup in honor of pagan gods is impossible. The two cannot go together. Paul employs “*drink the cup of*” as in Isaiah 51; 17; Ezkel 23:31-33 LXX). The use of Kyrios “Lord” stands in total contrast to demons.

**The Table of the Lord**

“You cannot partake of the table of the Lord and the table of demons. The phrase, “table of the Lord,” is found in Malachi 1:7, 12 LXX, where the prophet protests against priests in Judah who offered polluted food on the altar and thus despised the name of the Lord who is (Yahweh). The same prophetic message is applied here for the Christian celebration of the “Lord’s Supper” (1 Cor 11:20). Paul extends the meaning of table even to the altar of pagan gods, as in Isaiah 65:11 (LXX), “*setting a table for a demon*.”

In the Pagan World, friends used to invite their friends to the feasts of the gods and to drink wine in the cup offered to the gods. There is one Egyptian papyrus that has kept that kind of invitation, the text of which invites someone “to dine in the Serapeion at the reclining dinner-couch of the Lord Serapis tomorrow” (Chaeremon requests your company at dinner at the table of the lord Sarapis in the serapeum tomorrow, the 15th, at 9 o'clock.) The Serapeion was a temple and a library dedicated to the god Serapis in Alexandria, and it was demolished late 4th century by Theophanous bishop of Alexandria.

We have an image of this bishop standing on a pillar, in a MS of the Gospel.

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Theophanus, Bishop of Alexandria, 4th Century

**VERSE 22 –** *Or are we stirring the Lord to jealousy?*

Idolatrous behavior of the Israelites provoked Yahweh to anger. Read the Song of Moses (Deut 32:21, *“They have stirred me to jealousy with what is not a god; they have provoked me with their idols”* (and also Exod 32:5). Paul stresses that God’s anger cannot be confronted with latitude (Exod 20:4-5; 34:14; Josh 24:19-20; Ps 78:58).

This jealousy of God in the OT is that of the husband of Israel and the anger is that of a husband who has been deserted. But in the NT we have a different relationship under a new covenant. God’s jealousy can be provoked but to the groaning intercession of the Holy Spirit and also to the intercession of the One who died for us (Rom 8:23ff)

**VERSE 22 (cont.) –** *Are we stronger than God?*

Paul does not spell out his answers to this question and the previous one. What is the exact strength on our side that allows us to compare it with God’ strength? The reference here is to those who are “strong” and have wisdom and who “possess knowledge” in the church of Corinth who care not about the “weak.”

But even so there is a line in the Old books that warns us not to dispute with God as in the book of Ecclesiasticus (LXX) “*It is known what a human being is, and that he cannot dispute with one stronger than he*” (6:19; or even Job 9:32; 37:23; Isa 45:9).

***Pope’s Notes***

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