

NAIROBI EVANGELICAL GRADUATE  
SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

EXAMINATION OF I CORINTHIANS 10 AND 11,  
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE LORD'S SUPPER:  
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE METHODIST CHURCH IN KENYA

BY

EMMANUEL NII OKAI CLOTTEY

A Thesis submitted to the Graduate  
School in partial fulfilment of the requirements for  
the degree of Master of Theology in Biblical Studies  
(New Testament)

- JUNE, 2003 -

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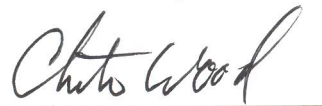
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**JUNE, 2003.**

**0031658**

Student's Declaration

EXAMINATION OF 1 CORINTHIANS 10 AND 11,  
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE LORD'S SUPPER:  
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE METHODIST CHURCH IN KENYA.

I declare that this is my original work and has not been  
submitted to any other College or University for academic credit.

The views presented herein are not necessarily those of the Nairobi Evangelical  
Graduate School of Theology or the Examiners.



Emmanuel Nii Okai Clotey

June 6, 2003.

## ABSTRACT

This thesis is an examination of 1 Corinthians 10: 14-22 and 11: 17-34. The findings from the examination were applied to the practice and meaning of the Lord's Supper in the Methodist Church in Kenya.

In chapter one, we looked at introductory matters such as the statement of the problem, potential benefits of the study, presuppositions, methodology, and delimitations. In chapter two, we looked at the historical, geographical, social and textual contexts of the Lord's Supper. This included the background of the Corinthian Church, the origin of the Lord's Supper as well as meal- eating in the time of Paul. Also a general survey of the book was done to establish the textual context of the Lord's Supper.

Chapter three is an exegesis of the 1 Corinthians passages, with due attention to all issues of hermeneutical interest in order to establish Paul's teaching about the Lord's Supper.

In chapter four, we examined by way of exegesis how Paul related the Lord's Supper to the judgment of God. In other words, for what was God judging the Corinthians? Chapter five is a summary of the examination of the two passages. The principles from the research were applied to the African situation of the Methodist Church in Kenya. A conclusion was then drawn.

To

Our Lord Jesus Christ, whose Supper we celebrate,

and to my family, my wife and children.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My first and foremost thanks goes to Our Lord Jesus Christ for enabling me to come this far in my education at NEGST. He did this through many people who He used to help me in one way or the other. Since the people are so many, I will not be able to mention all of them by name. Also there are those of them who would want to remain anonymous. A mention of the following few will therefore do:

1. Dr Samuel Ngewa, my first reader, for his guidance.
2. Dr. Chester Wood, my second reader and his wife, for their encouragement and the many books they availed to me for my thesis.
3. The head of the Biblical Studies Department, Dr. Mark Mercer, and all the lecturers of the Department, for their constant encouragement.
4. Dr. Raman Suraja, who impressed it upon me to come and study at NEGST.
5. The entire NEGST teaching and non-teaching staff, for whatever help they gave me in one way or the other, during my studies at NEGST.
6. The NEGST Scholarship Committee, for the scholarship they gave me to enable me go through NEGST.
7. The Faith Missionary Church in the U.S.A., for the money they provided through the NEGST Scholarship Committee.
8. My wife, Valentina, and our children, for the various ways in which they supported me.
9. All the members of our families who kept encouraging me during my study, and the many friends in Ghana and elsewhere who prayed for us.

10. The leadership of the Methodist Church in Kenya, for granting me the permission to go and study at NEGST.
  11. The many members from the Methodist Church in Kenya who supported me in numerous ways during my study.
  12. Mr. and Mrs. Kingsley Nettey, for their constant support for me and my family during my study at NEGST.
  13. The family of Mr. Kwame Boafo, for their helpful support during my study.
  14. The family of Pastor Stephen Sitali, for their constant encouragement to me during my course of study.
  15. The family of Wangari Wanguru, for tirelessly supporting my family.
  16. The family of Mr. Mbichi Mboroki, for their kindness to my family.
  17. The family of Mr John Jusu, for the help he gave me in editing my thesis.
  18. All the staff at *Help For the Brothers*, for their kind hospitality when I stayed there to concentrate on my thesis.
  19. All the many people who helped me, and my family in many ways.
  20. The list can go on forever but we have to stop somewhere. So if there is anyone whose name I have not mentioned, please note that it is not intentional.
- I love and appreciate you all for your love and concern for me.

May the good Lord bless each and every person who helped us during my study at NEGST. Shalom to you all. Amen.

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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Problem Statement and Rationale for the Thesis**

On the night that Jesus Christ was betrayed, He instituted the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Since then the church has been celebrating this ceremony until today. In fact the Lord's Supper is considered one of the cardinal religious praxes of Christianity<sup>1</sup>

In Africa, the celebration of this ceremony has continued for many years, yet many partake of it in ignorance because of lack of (or wrong) teaching about it. This has led to the administration and partaking of the sacrament in a manner short of the biblical teaching on the subject. Many Church members partake of it simply because they are Church members without understanding the full implication of the sacrament for their lives and behavior. This concern has been expressed by O'Rourke who observes that: "There is no clear evidence that there is any overflow from the Eucharistic celebration into ordinary life as it is lived."<sup>2</sup>

The reason for this problem might be that not much has been written on the meaning and practice of the Lord's Supper in Africa leading to inadequate teaching and understanding of the matter. To find a book entirely devoted to the Lord's Supper in the context of Africa is very hard to come by. For example, in the Methodist Church

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<sup>1</sup>N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1992), 361.

<sup>2</sup>Brian O'Rourke, "The Eucharist in its Social Dimension," *Africa Theological Journal* 18, no. 1 (1989) : 28.

in Kenya, there is no written document which deals exclusively with the subject despite the fact that it forms part of the regular practices of the Church. The mention of it in the *Standing Orders and Agenda* of the Church is basically for the purpose of giving guidance on who should administer it and who should partake of it or be excluded.<sup>3</sup> The Church relies on the British Methodist's *Service Book*, which only outlines the process of how the Holy Communion is to be administered. Apart from these, the Methodist Church in Kenya has no single book, which looks at the biblical, historical and theological basis for the Lord's Supper. There is therefore the need for a book, which deals with both the theological and practical issues of this important praxis of the Church. When one considers the fact that the Methodist Church in Kenya has a population which currently stands at well over 150,000 members and that new branches are being established occasionally, the writing of such a book on the Holy Communion is long overdue.<sup>4</sup> We also need to mention that the Methodist Church has been in Kenya since 1862 and that the Methodist Church in Kenya gained its autonomy from the British Conference in 1967.<sup>5</sup> It is therefore lamentable that for all these years no comprehensive book has been written for the Church on such an important praxis as the Holy Communion.

This thesis will be an exegesis of 1 Cor.10:14-22 and 11:17-34 to investigate the correct biblical position and then apply it to the practices of the Methodist Church in Kenya with regard to the celebration of the Lord's Supper. Also we shall be informed by other passages such as the gospels, which deal with the Last Supper. The

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<sup>3</sup>The Standing Orders is the working constitution of the Methodist Church in Kenya.

<sup>4</sup>The statistical returns for the year 2001, stands at 182,088, not counting children.

<sup>5</sup> Zablon John Nthamburi, *A History of the Methodist Church in Kenya* (Nairobi: Uzima 1982), 147, 148.

above passages are chosen because the Pauline teaching about the Eucharist in 1 Corinthians "are the earliest written accounts of the Lord's Supper known to us in the New Testament."<sup>6</sup> And they are the most significant passages, which deal with practical issues relating to the Lord's Supper. Another reason is that the Corinthian Church was basically Gentile, hence there are many similarities between them and African Churches,<sup>7</sup> the Methodist Church in Kenya being African in every sense of the word. And so many lessons from the Corinthian Church can be applied to the Methodist Church in Kenya. The biblical teaching we arrive at will then be applied to the African realities or context of the Methodist Church in Kenya.

### **Method**

The study will be basically Biblical and Theological. All theological issues about the research topic will be examined in light of the exegesis of the relevant Scriptural passages. Our main passages will be 1 Cor. 10: 14-22; 11: 17-34. The study will involve a careful exegesis of the selected passages. This will include an examination of the historical and socio-cultural background of the practice of the Lord's Supper as well as the related issues, which caused Paul to write about it. Also we shall look at the style of writing of the book of 1 Corinthians and the location of our passages in the book. Whatever principles we gather from the study will then be applied to the Eucharistic practices of the Methodist Church in Kenya.

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<sup>6</sup>David T. Adamo, "The Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 10:14-22, 11:17-34," *Africa Theological Journal* 18, no. 1 (1989) : 36.

<sup>7</sup>Problems such as idolatry, factionalism, moral and ethical issues which beset the African Church are also common to the Corinthians: 1: 10-4: 21; 5: 1-6: 20; 8: 1-13; 10: 6-33.

### **Data Collection**

The thesis will be research based and the research will be undertaken in the Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology ( N.E.G.S.T.) library and other libraries such as Nairobi International School of Theology ( N.I.S.T), Daystar University (D.U.), Africa Nazarene University (A.N.U.), Catholic University of Eastern Africa (C.U.E.A.), The Kenya Methodist University, St. Paul's United Theological College, Hekima College and any other library within reach where appropriate materials can be found. We will also gather whatever material we can get from the Methodist Church in Kenya.

### **Potential Benefits of the Thesis**

It is hoped that the thesis will help the Methodist Church in Kenya (and its sister Churches such as the Kenya Free Methodist Church, the Kenya United Methodist Church and all Churches that have similar beliefs and practices to that of the Methodist Church in Kenya about the Lord's Supper) to know and follow the correct biblical teaching about the significance of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. It will shed light on who should administer the sacrament, who should partake of it and who should be excluded from it. Another benefit of the thesis will be to set the ball rolling for the Methodist Church in Kenya to get started on writing a comprehensive document, which deals exclusively with the Holy Communion.<sup>8</sup>

It is also hoped that this teaching will help the church to administer the sacrament more correctly and reverently and that church members will partake of it in repentance, faith and deep reverence. Also that the lives of those who partake of the

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<sup>8</sup>We have earlier mentioned that the Methodist Church in Kenya has no written document, which deals exclusively with the subject. See page 2.

Holy Communion, will be consistent with the Scriptures in all godliness. We also hope that the communicants who shy away from the ceremony because of one fear or another will be helped to see that the Holy Communion is not for the sinless saint but for the repentant believer who is willing to partake in faith. Another benefit is that the study will help to teach the believers who partake in a frivolous manner and who continue to live in perpetual sin that the Holy Communion can be a source of God's divine judgment. It is also hoped that this study will encourage the believers in the Methodist Church in Kenya to work toward unity and to shun factionalism in any form.

### **Presuppositions**

It is presupposed that the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper is of great importance in Christianity, because it was instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ Himself. It is also presupposed that the Lord's Supper is of significance to all Christians and Churches because all the major branches of Christianity celebrate it. This includes the Roman Catholic denomination, the Orthodox denomination, the Presbyterians, Methodists, Anglicans, Lutherans and many more.<sup>9</sup> The significance of it can be seen in the process some of these denominations follow to select those members of their flock who will partake of it. In the Lutheran Church, for example, one must be a confirmed member before one is allowed to partake of it.<sup>10</sup> The significance is also seen from the fact that the Eucharist, along with baptism, is one of the most easily identifiable

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<sup>9</sup>This is common knowledge, which anybody can easily verify from any of these denominations.

<sup>10</sup> Leonidas Kalugila, "Confirmation Rite and Eucharist," trans. Zakayo Kimaro. *Africa Theological Journal* 21, no. 3 (1992) : 265. As a Minister of the Methodist Church, the researcher can say with certainty that this is the practice of the Methodist Church also. In the Methodist Church in Kenya, only baptized and confirmed members who are in good standing with the Church are allowed to participate in the Holy Communion. Also, persistent absenteeism from the celebration of the Holy Communion is a sufficient ground for discipline. This is clearly stated in Standing Order 84 of the Methodist Church in Kenya

before his death.<sup>12</sup> Paul is the only person to use the phrase in the whole of the New Testament in his letter to the Corinthian Church (1 Cor. 11: 20).

**Eucharist:** This is another term used to describe the Lord's Supper and refers to the thanksgiving aspect of it.<sup>13</sup> The term comes from the Greek word εὐχαριστία which means "thankfulness, gratitude... the rendering of thanks, thanksgiving."<sup>14</sup> The term is so used because of the fact that Jesus, in eating the Last Supper, "gave thanks" over the cup before giving it to his disciples.<sup>15</sup> It might also be "because the service is the supreme act of Christian thanksgiving."<sup>16</sup>

**Holy Communion:** This term is also used to refer to the Lord's Supper and has "the idea of sharing."<sup>17</sup> The word communion comes from the Greek word κοινωμία which means "association, communion, fellowship, close relationship."<sup>18</sup> The use of this word (κοινωνία) in Acts 2: 44; 4:32 has a sense of communality or commonality. The phrase "Holy Communion" is used to refer to the Lord's Supper and it originates from Paul's usage of the word "communion" in 1 Cor. 10:16 in reference to the Lord's Supper. The term "emphasizes the oneness between believers as they share in the same bread and wine, the symbol of the body and blood of

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<sup>12</sup>Fred D. Howard, *Interpreting the Lord's Supper* (Nashville, Tennessee: Broadman Press, 1966), 11. Cf. 1 Cor. 11: 23-26; Lk 22: 7-20; Mt 26: 17-29; Mk 14: 12-25.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker, *Shorter Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*. rev. ed. (London: The University of Chicago Press, 1983), 82.

<sup>15</sup>See Matt 26: 27

<sup>16</sup>Elizabeth A. Livingstone, ed., *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 179.

<sup>17</sup>Fred D. Howard, *Interpreting the Lord's Supper* (Nashville Tennessee: Broadman, 1966), 11

<sup>18</sup>Gingrich and Danker, *Shorter Lexicon*. 110.

practices in every branch of Christianity. One will not fail to recognize its celebration irrespective of the denomination or even the country in which one finds it. The researcher recalls a video he watched while attending a conference in Geneva, Switzerland. The video was about a celebration of the Eucharist in Poland being conducted in Polish and despite the language difference, he could still recognize it as the Holy Communion. The most recognizable feature about the ceremony is the bread and the wine.

Another presupposition is that the partaking of the Lord's Supper is a serious issue for the believers because those who partake in an inappropriate manner risk the judgment of God.<sup>11</sup> So we need to know the things which bring about God's judgment and a careful understanding of them in order to avoid them. Who knows if this might help to reduce the number of weak and sick believers as well as the number who are dying. At the same time, we need to disabuse the minds of many who are unwilling to partake of the Lord's Supper because they think that the Lord's Supper is for the "sinless" believer.

### **Definition of Terms**

Various terms are used to refer to the commemoration of Jesus' last meal with his disciples. Here we define the most prominent ones among Protestants;

**Lord's Supper:** This refers to the religious meal, which Christians partake of in remembrance of the death of Jesus Christ. Here it is used in the technical sense to signify the commemoration of the Last Supper Jesus had with his twelve disciples

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<sup>11</sup>1 Cor 11: 29-32



Christ.”<sup>19</sup> This oneness is not only with among the believers alone, but also with the Lord. In fact, the oneness began with the Lord. The communion or fellowship with the Lord and with fellow believers was considered so separate and distinct that the Church referred to it as “holy” hence the phrase “Holy Communion” to refer to the ceremony.

**Sacrament:** This term, which comes from the Latin word *sacramentum*, has undergone various changes in its usage. In classical times, the term was used as a legal term “to denote the sum of money that two parties to a suit deposited in a temple...”<sup>20</sup> The winner of the suit “had his part returned, while the loser forfeited his to the temple treasury...”<sup>21</sup> It was also used as a “military term to designate the oath of obedience of a soldier to his commander.”<sup>22</sup> Later on the word was used to translate the Greek word μυστηριον which means “mystery.”<sup>23</sup> In Christian terms, it is used to denote “a thing set apart as sacred...”<sup>24</sup> It finally “came to be applied to certain rites of the church, especially to baptism and the Lord’s Supper.”<sup>25</sup> It is commonly defined as “an outward and visible sign, ordained by Christ, setting forth and pledging an inward and spiritual blessing.”<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> M.E. Manton, *A Dictionary of Theological Terms*, rev. ed. (London: Grace Publications, 2001), 38.

<sup>20</sup> Steven Barabas, “Sacrament” in *The New International Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. J. D. Douglas and M.C. Tenney (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1987), 878.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ronald Wallace, “Sacrament.” in *Baker’s Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Everett F. Harrison, Geoffrey W. Bromiley and Carl F.H. Henry (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1979), 465

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Fred D. Howard, *Interpreting the Lord’s Supper* 12.

<sup>26</sup> R.J. Coates, “Sacraments,” in *New Bible Dictionary*, ed. J.D. Douglas and others (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 1044

**Mass:** This is another name by which the Lord's Supper is known. This name is mostly used by Roman Catholics. The term is derived "from the Latin *mittere*, 'to send' or 'dismiss', and was applied to the service from which the people were dismissed" especially from the Lord's Supper.<sup>27</sup>

Throughout this study the terms Lord's Supper, Eucharist, Holy Communion and Sacrament will be used interchangeably to refer to the same ceremony unless otherwise stated. We need to mention that in the Methodist Church in Kenya, the predominant phraseology used is the Holy Communion.

### **Delimitation**

Delimitation is to set the limits of our research, that is the specific things we will do and what we will not do. This study will be a careful exegesis of 1 Corinthians 10:14-22 and 11: 17-34. As an introduction to the exegesis, we will do a general survey of the book of 1 Corinthians in order to help us see the main issues in the book. The principles from the exegesis will be applied to the context of the Methodist Church in Kenya. Other parts of the New Testament (such as Mt 26: 17-29; Mk 14: 12-25; Lk 22: 7-20; Jn 13: 1-38), which deal with the issue of the Lord's Supper will be mentioned only for comparative purposes but will not be exegeted in detail. We will also not go into details of the theological positions held by various denominations on the Lord's Supper. Discussion of those theological positions is beyond the scope of this research.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>E. A. Livingstone, ed. *Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 326.

<sup>28</sup>For a discussion of those theological positions, see Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*. Unabridged One Volume (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1990) , 1107-1128.

## **Outline**

### Chapter 1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter will deal with introductory issues such as the statement of the problem, potential benefits of the study, presuppositions, methodology and delimitations.

### Chapter 2. CONTEXT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

This chapter will look at the historical, geographical, social and textual contexts of the Lord's Supper. This will include the background of the Corinthian Church, the origin of the Lord's Supper as well as meal-eating in the time of Paul. Also a general survey of the book will be done to establish the textual context. This will help us to get a good understanding of the circumstances under which Paul wrote about the Lord's Supper.

### Chapter 3. PAUL'S RESPONSE TO ISSUES ABOUT THE LORD'S SUPPER.

In this chapter, careful exegesis of the passages will be done giving due attention to all issues of hermeneutical interest in order to establish Paul's teaching about the Lord's Supper.

### Chapter 4. THE LORD'S SUPPER AND THE JUDGEMENT OF GOD

In this chapter, we will examine by way of exegesis how Paul relates the Lord's Supper to the Judgement of God. In other words, for what is God judging the Corinthians?

### Chapter 5. SUMMARY, APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we will summarize our findings from the research Principles from the research will be applied to the African situation of the Methodist Church in

Kenya and we will then draw a conclusion.

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#### SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Here, a list of the materials consulted in the research will be listed.

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## CHAPTER TWO

### CONTEXT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER

In order to understand Paul's teaching about the Lord's Supper, we need to understand the circumstances under which Paul wrote his epistle (1 Corinthians) to the Corinthian Church. Our interest will particularly be focused on the issues which relate to the Lord's Supper.<sup>1</sup> We will look at the Corinthian Church in its wider Greco-Roman context. This will include the city of Corinth, how the Church started and what happened when Paul left Corinth, as well as meal-eating or private dinners. Also we shall separately look at how the Lord's Supper began.

#### The City of Corinth.

The city of Corinth in which Paul founded the Church was a rebuilt city. The original city was built by the Greeks but was destroyed by the Romans in 146 B.C.<sup>2</sup> Many years later, in 44 B.C. Julius Ceasar, the Roman Emperor, rebuilt and peopled it "from three sources of the *Roman* populace: (1) freedmen, (2) his own veterans and (3) urban trades persons and laborers."<sup>3</sup> The new city was built according to Roman

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<sup>1</sup>Because there are many other issues in the book of I Corinthians which fall outside the scope of our topic under discussion.

<sup>2</sup>Ben Witherington, *Conflict & Community in Corinth: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary on 1 and 2 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1995), 5.

<sup>3</sup>Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians. The New International Greek Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 3.

architectural convention, and not by its original Greek architecture.<sup>4</sup> Winter explains that even the temples of various gods were rebuilt in accordance with Roman temple structures.<sup>5</sup> Also by virtue of the city being a Roman colony, it was greatly influenced by Roman values and practices. As Winter observes “Corinth, therefore, was not a Greek city with a Roman façade. It was conceived of, and deliberately laid out, as a thoroughly Roman colony. *Romanitas* describes the architectural style of first-century Corinth, and it reflected an ideological outlook which provides important evidence of Corinth’s culture in Paul’s day.”<sup>6</sup> As the city underwent continual rebuilding, it grew in fame, making the people of Corinth to have “both growing civic pride and individual pride.”<sup>7</sup> There is evidence that most Corinthians went out of their way to erect inscriptions in their honor, showing their social standing or contribution to society.<sup>8</sup> This was probably due to the fact that “Corinth was a city where public boasting and self-promotion had become an art form.”<sup>9</sup> In such a society “public recognition was often more important than facts” and “the worst thing that could happen was for one’s reputation to be publicly tarnished.”<sup>10</sup> This honor-shame cultural orientation is not peculiar to the Corinthians alone but permeates the entire Mediterranean world of the first-century.<sup>11</sup> These values and culture of the

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<sup>4</sup> Bruce W. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), 8.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>7</sup>Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 8.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>See Bruce Malina’s discussion of this in *The New Testament World*, rev. ed. (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1993), 28-60.

Romans affected even the Christians to such an extent that they tried to solve problems in accordance with the Roman values and culture they had grown up with before becoming Christians. As Witherington rightly observes,

These cultural factors come into play over and over again in 1 and 2 Corinthians, where boasting, preening, false pride, and the like are topics that the apostle addresses repeatedly. Even though they were converted to a new religious orientation, the Corinthian Christians brought with them into the *ekklesia* many of the primary social values gained over a life of living with a particular cultural orientation.<sup>12</sup>

The city had two principal ports opening to the east towards Asia and to the west towards Rome, thus making it a vital commercial link between Asia and the West. This made it possible for traders and travelers (traveling by sea) to stop there for a break before proceeding on their journey. By all standards, Corinth was a cosmopolitan city and “the capital of the Roman province of Achaia.”<sup>13</sup> The Isthmian games was held there for some time before relocating it to the neighboring town of Sicyon. It was held every two years and the presidency of the games was bestowed on Corinth.<sup>14</sup> This, together with the movements of various travellers through her ports, resulted in the influx of many people visiting the city of Corinth throughout the year. With this influx of visitors and the flourish of commerce, Corinth became a city full of all kinds of sexual immorality.<sup>15</sup> Apart from the mention of thousand

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<sup>12</sup>Witherington, *Conflict & Community in Corinth*, 8.

<sup>13</sup> Leon Morris, *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians*, reprint (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1975), 16.

<sup>14</sup> J. Murphy-O’connor, “Corinth,” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 1, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1138.

<sup>15</sup> R.C.H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of I and II Corinthians* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Augsburg, 1963), 12.

prostitutes at the temple of Aphrodite, sexual immorality was also prevalent among the populace.<sup>16</sup>

The religious plurality of Corinth, especially that of idolatry is well attested in various documents. Witherington mentions many gods and goddesses to whom temples were built.<sup>17</sup> These included Aphrodite, ‘the goddess of love, beauty, and fertility’ and who “prostitutes consider her their patroness.”<sup>18</sup> In fact, at the temple of Aphrodite, there were many prostitutes.<sup>19</sup> Other deities include Apollo, Asklepios, Hera Argaea and many more. All these various gods and goddesses had their temples, and during the Isthmian games the President “gave multiple civic dinners to those who had Corinthian citizenship ie. Roman citizens” in some of these temples.<sup>20</sup> Some of the Christians, who considered themselves to be strong and knowledgeable, felt that they were free to attend these dinners in the temples.<sup>21</sup>

Among the city’s populace, as with other Roman cities, social stratification was evident. And the population was divided “into two main categories, those with influence and those without it, the “honorable” and the “humble,” those who governed and those who were governed, those who had property and those who did not. The

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<sup>16</sup>See Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians. The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1987) , 2-3.

<sup>17</sup>Witherington, *Conflict & Community in Corinth*, 12-18.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid. , 12.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid. , 13.

<sup>20</sup>Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth*, 5.

<sup>21</sup>Cf. 1 Cor 8: 9.



upper category was very small, the lower one very large.”<sup>22</sup> This social stratification in the society was so entrenched that even at both private and public dinners, where one sat and what one ate “depended strictly on your status...”<sup>23</sup>

The Isthmian games were not the only place where people competed with each other. Even among secular teachers there was competition for students.<sup>24</sup> The students they got became their disciples and these students remained loyal to them.<sup>25</sup> Sometimes students from different teachers argued among themselves about which of their teachers was the best. This “secular educational mores of Corinth” might be what greatly influenced the Corinthian Church such that they applied it to Paul, Apollo and the rest.<sup>26</sup> We see from the situation in the city that issues such as idolatry, class distinctions, pride, sexual immorality and competitive spirit were the norm in the socio-cultural milieu in which the Corinthian Church was born.

### **The Corinthian Church**

The Corinthian Church was established by Paul during his second missionary journey around 50 A.D. According to Acts 18:1-11, Paul went to Corinth from Athens and stayed with Aquila and his wife Priscilla for some time. He worked together with them making tents, and Paul used his Sabbaths to preach in the Synagogues to both Jews and Greeks. Later on, when he was joined by Silas and Timothy, he devoted

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<sup>22</sup>John E. Stambaugh and David L. Balch, *The New Testament in Its Social Environment* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986) , 110.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid. , 114.

<sup>24</sup>Cf. Winter, *After Paul Left Corinth*, 36.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid. , 38.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid. , 64. cf. 1 Cor. 1: 10-12.

himself more completely to the preaching of the word Acts 18:5. In all, Paul stayed in Corinth for about eighteen months and preached to Jews, Greeks and Roman freedmen. The fruit of his labor was the birth of a Church with a mixture of Jews, Greeks and freedmen. In this mixture, people were of different social standings with the majority coming “from the lower classes.”<sup>27</sup> Paul mentions in 1 Cor. 7: 21-23 as well as 12:13 that some of the Church members were slaves. He also attests to the fact that many of them were of the lower classes, for he writes; “Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.”<sup>28</sup> This passage from Paul also shows that the “influential members who come from the upper classes were few.”<sup>29</sup> Thiessen adds that this contrast between the rich and the poor was one of the causes of friction in the Church.<sup>30</sup> One such influential member was Erastus, the city’s treasurer whom Paul mentions in Rom 16:23.<sup>31</sup> Acts 18:8 records that the leader of the Synagogue (a Jew named Crispus) and his household also believed and joined the Church. It is likely that many other Jews might have followed his example and converted to Christianity from Judaism. From all this information we gather that “the social level of the Corinthian Christians apparently varied from quite poor to rather well-off” members.<sup>32</sup> Since the Church had no official buildings, it means that they

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<sup>27</sup> Gerd Thiessen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity: Essays on Corinth*, edited and trans. John H. Schutz (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 69.

<sup>28</sup> 1 Cor. 1: 26.

<sup>29</sup> Thiessen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, 69.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 145-175.

<sup>31</sup> Stambaugh and Balch have shown that there were some inscriptions found in 1927 and 1947 which identify this Erastus. *The New Testament in Its Social Environment*, 160.

<sup>32</sup> Witherington, *Conflict & Community in Corinth*, 22.

met in the homes of the rich members who owned property.<sup>33</sup> Such rich owners will then be acting as Patrons of the Church and will be influential among the believers.<sup>34</sup> In Rom 16: 3-5, Paul sends greetings to Priscilla and Aquila, and “the Church that meets at their home.” It is most likely that the Corinthian Church began in their home when Paul was staying with them. Apart from the social differences there were also religious differences with some (such as Crispus) and others coming from backgrounds of Judaism and paganism respectively. Paul acknowledges the pagan background of some by referring to it in 1 Cor. 12: 2. We need to realize that the majority of the believers were Gentiles.<sup>35</sup> This might explain why many of the problems Paul addressed were not of Jewish background but Gentile.

As a congregation, the Church was greatly gifted in spiritual gifts to the extent that Paul comments that they “do not lack any spiritual gift” (1 Cor 1:7). But despite their giftedness, they were both immature and unspiritual and were beset with schisms (chapters 1-4), immorality (5; 6:12-20), litigation (6:1-8), arguments about food offered to idols (8-10), inappropriate partaking of the Lord’s Supper (10:14-22; 11:17-34) and misunderstanding about the resurrection (chapter 15). Of all these problems, the most fundamental is factionalism which sought to tear the Church apart. It is hardly surprising that the Church faced these problems considering the socio-cultural milieu in which it was born. The value system of Christianity is directly opposite to the value system of the Corinthian city. We have earlier on mentioned that the Corinthian culture was characterized by idolatry, class distinctions, pride,

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Craig Blomberg, *1 Corinthians. The NIV Application Commentary*, ed. Terry Muck (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 20.

<sup>35</sup>Cf. Fee, *First Epistle*, 4.

sexual immorality and competitive spirit. This is opposite to the Christian values of strict monotheism, commonality, humility, chastity and the spirit of non-competition (Acts 2-6; 15:20, 28, 29). It is therefore obvious that as people became Christians they would find themselves struggling between these two different value systems; that of Christianity and that of the city of Corinth. Some responded in one way and others responded in another way. These different responses might be the cause of the factionalism, which sought to destroy the Church. One area in which the divisions emerged or became apparent was at meal times and to understand why, we need to look at meal-eating in the first century.

### **Meal-Eating in the Ancient World**

Just like in Africa, meals were an important aspect of life in the ancient world. We need to mention from the onset that during the Hellenistic and Roman periods, meal “customs in the entire Mediterranean region seem to have become standardized in certain broad details.”<sup>36</sup> Smith goes on to add that despite some unique practices which various ethnic groups maintained, yet “Greeks, Romans, Jews, and eventually Christians shared major components of the standard meal customs of this period.”<sup>37</sup> But we need to mention that despite the standard forms, the meanings attached to the meals varied. For example, among the Jews every meal was considered as a religious one.<sup>38</sup> This is not necessarily so among the Gentiles. Also Gentiles could eat at the shrines of different idols, but Jews can only eat at the temple of Yahweh due to their strict monotheism. Basically, there were three main types of meals in the ancient

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<sup>36</sup> Dennis E. Smith, “Greco-Roman Meal Customs,” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 4., ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 650.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Joachim Jeremais, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, trans. Norman Perrin (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 30.

world: ordinary meals where people eat and drink simply because they were hungry and thirsty, social meals where people eat at social gatherings such as weddings, farewells etc, and religious meals where people eat as part of a religious celebration such as the Passover meal. Both social and religious meals are normally communal in nature because they involve many people. Some ordinary meals were also communal, because people invited their relatives and friends for a meal not because of any specific occasion but basically to eat and chat. Such an ordinary meal, then takes on a social nature. Among the Jews, every meal (whether ordinary, social or religious) had a religious dimension, in that they gave thanks to God and believed that they were eating their meal in God's presence. Jeremias explains that meals had "religious solemnity" because of the grace that was always said, irrespective of whether it was taken alone or in company, or whether it was mere snack or a formal meal with which wine was taken."<sup>39</sup> The Jewish meals therefore "became ways of experiencing and enjoying God's presence and provision."<sup>40</sup> Among devout Jews "God's presence was expected, awaited and enjoyed at everyday meals..." and "all meals were sacred because God had provided them."<sup>41</sup>

In ordinary meals, one or more people may be involved but the social and religious meals are actually communal meals in that they involve many people. Marshall explains that communal meals in the ancient times "served a social purpose in bringing the adherents together, and they functioned religiously in a variety of

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<sup>39</sup>Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, 30.

<sup>40</sup> Leland Ryken, James C Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman, eds. "Meal," in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, 3d ed. (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2001) [CD-Rom].

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

ways.”<sup>42</sup> There are all kinds of allusions to meals in the Bible and “passages in which invitations are given to enter or lodge in a house almost always imply an invitation to a meal as well.”<sup>43</sup> Mention of any of the following also usually indicates a meal: food, breaking of bread, drink, cup, eating “before the Lord,” sitting, reclining, table, anointing with oil and foot washing or hand washing.”<sup>44</sup>

The Bible mentions all kinds of communal meals in both Israel and the Gentile world. In some instances, communal meals were given by monarchs and members of royal families. In the book of Esther, we see King Ahasuerus giving a banquet to his captains and servants; “In the third year of his rule he gave a feast to all his captains and his servants; and the captains of the army of Persia and Media, the great men and the rulers of the divisions of his kingdom, were present before him.”<sup>45</sup> We read from Gen 40:20 that on Pharaoh's birthday, “he gave a feast for all his servants; and he gave honour to the chief wine-servant and the chief bread-maker among the others.” The kings and nobles of Israel also gave feasts and banquets to all kinds of people. We read of Solomon, David, Nehemiah (to mention but a few) who gave banquets to all kinds of people.<sup>46</sup> We see other examples of communal meals at weddings, celebration of victory and just plain socialization.<sup>47</sup> Communal meals then can carry social, political, religious, and cultural overtones in the lives of ancient people. For

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<sup>42</sup> I. H. Marshall, “The Lord’s Supper,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 570.

<sup>43</sup>For example Lk 19:1–10.

<sup>44</sup>Ryken, Wilhoit and Longman. eds. “Meal,” [CD-Rom]

<sup>45</sup>Est 1:3. See Est 1:9; 2:16-18; 5:4; 7:1-8; 9:1-32 for other feasts and banquets.

<sup>46</sup>See 1 Sam 9: 11,13; 1 Kg 10:5; Neh. 5:17.

<sup>47</sup>Lk. 14: 1-14; Jn. 2:1,2; Est. 9:18-22; Gen. 42: 31-34.

example, Smith has shown that “formally organized clubs, whether trade guilds, funerary societies, religions associations, or even philosophical schools, usually centered their regular meetings around communal meal.”<sup>48</sup>

In the time of Jesus and Paul, communal eating set certain boundaries and defined the social standing of a person. It has been noted that

A meal was never simply a time to ingest food and quench thirst; at meals people displayed kinship and friendship. Meals themselves—the foods served, the manner in which that was done and by whom—carried socially significant, coded communication. The more formal the meal, the more loaded with messages. The messages had to do with honor, social rank in the family and community, belonging and purity, or holiness. Social status and role were acted out in differentiated tasks and expectations around meals, and the maintenance of balance and harmony at meals was crucial to the sense of overall well-being.<sup>49</sup>

This means that the person you ate with, what you ate and the occasion had all kinds of connotations attached to it. This might explain why for example, the Pharisees and teachers of the law criticized Jesus for eating with tax-collectors and “sinners” because they did not expect a teacher like him to eat with such kinds of people.<sup>50</sup> At another time when Jesus was invited to eat in the home of a *prominent Pharisee*, Jesus used the occasion to speak against the social dynamics of the rich people, which manifested itself at the meals.<sup>51</sup> For Luke records (in Lk 14: 7) that Jesus “noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table.” Jesus’ advice about who should be invited (in verses 12-14), might be because this *prominent Pharisee* might have invited only people of his class or social standing; friends, relatives and rich neighbors. He must have been very concerned about his social standing and the honor

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<sup>48</sup>Smith, “Greco-Roman Meal Customs,” 651.

<sup>49</sup>Ryken, Wilhoit and Longman. eds. “Meal,” [CD-Rom]

<sup>50</sup>Matt. 9: 10,11, cf. Lk 19: 7.

<sup>51</sup>Lk 14:1-14.

that went with it. Inviting the poor and the kind of people Jesus suggested would have lowered his social rating.

There were various sitting arrangements at meals in ancient times. The arrangements vary from sitting on the floor, sitting on a chair with the food on a table to reclining on a couch. Reclining was common in the time of Jesus and Paul among both Jews and Gentiles. The couch on which guests reclined was provided “with cushions on which the left elbow rested and the right arm remained free, following the contemporary Greco-Roman fashion.”<sup>52</sup> Guests reclined in such a way that “each person could rest his head near the breast of the one who was reclining immediately behind him.”<sup>53</sup> Where one sat depended on ones social standing or ones closeness to the host.<sup>54</sup>

Among the Jews, they looked forward to an eschatological meal with God. The Prophet Isaiah, prophesies about it as follows; “On this mountain the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine-the best of meats and the finest of wines. On this mountain he will destroy the shroud that enfolds all peoples, the sheet that covers all nations; he will swallow up death forever.”<sup>55</sup> This might be the meal Jesus referred to at the last meal he had with his

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<sup>52</sup> J.D. Douglas, “Meals,” in *New Bible Dictionary*, 2d ed., ed J. D. Douglas, et. al. (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1982) , 753.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Jn. 13: 23. See Smith “Greco Roman Meal Customs,” 4, 651 who mentions that how guests sat at meals was customarily according to their social ranking.

<sup>55</sup> Isa. 25:6–7.



disciples in the Upper room.<sup>56</sup> Jesus also told a parable about this eschatological feast in Lk 14: 15-24. In the book of Revelation, this might be the meal which is referred to, for we read in Rev 19:9 that there is a “wedding supper of the Lamb” to which some people are invited. Of course we know that Jesus is the Lamb being referred to here. This eschatological meal might be the background to the eschatological expectations of the early Church.

Religious communal meal eating was common in the ancient world. We find it in the nation of Israel, among pagan worshippers as well as in the Church. Such communal meals (whether social or religious) can be found all across Africa. Dickson observes that; “Not only is this kind of common meal as a sacred act widely known in African ritual, but also one of life’s goals... is to maintain the social solidarity, and hence society’s equilibrium.”<sup>57</sup> In Israel, there were all kinds of religious feasts such as the Passover, Pentecost, Trumpets, Tabernacles, and Dedication. These feasts in Israel, were commanded by the LORD for the observance of all the Israelites.<sup>58</sup> Some or all of these feasts or meals were covenantal and considered sacred. It has been observed that

Special covenant meals held to seal and dramatize the ratification of a covenant were sacred, and God’s presence was assumed. Feasts were important to Israel’s worship and to the cultural rhythm of the year. These included ritual meals held to signify and remember events of God’s protection and intervention in the past (as in the Passover meal, Deut 16:1–8), and to accompany offerings and gifts celebrating God’s present provision for the people.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>56</sup>Cf. Mt 26:9; Mk 14:25; Lk 22:18.

<sup>57</sup>Kwesi Dickson, “The Theology of the Cross,” in *A Reader in African Christian Theology*, ed. John Parratt (London: SPCK, 1987), 91.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Lev. 23: 1-44.

<sup>59</sup>Ryken, Wilhoit and Longman, eds. “Meal.” [CD-Rom]

These communal meals are preceded by a sacrifice to Yahweh, after which the people eat before or in the presence of the Lord.<sup>60</sup> Marshall explains that “Since certain parts of the animal eaten at such a meal had been offered in sacrifice to Yahweh, the meal could be regarded as an occasion of communion between him and his people.”<sup>61</sup> The more than seven feasts in Israel are celebrated almost throughout the year. Of these feasts, the most important for our purpose is the feast of Passover, which was celebrated to commemorate the deliverance of the nation Israel from Egypt.

Communal meals were also common among the Qumran community, who ate their meals twice a day and one of their priests blesses the food before they eat.<sup>62</sup> Pate has shown that there are three similarities between the communal meals among the Qumran Community, and the Christian’s Lord’s Supper; both were “*sacral* in character,” “*continual* in practice”, and *eschatological* in orientation.”<sup>63</sup>

We have taken time and space to explain about Jewish Communal meals for two basic reasons. First, that Paul was a Jew and so his knowledge and understanding of table fellowship would have been shaped by his Jewish background. Secondly, Christian table fellowship have their roots in the Jewish table fellowships. But since most of the Corinthians are Gentiles, their knowledge and understanding of table-fellowships would have been shaped by their Greco-Roman background.

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<sup>60</sup>Deut. 12:7.

<sup>61</sup>Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord’s Supper*, 19.

<sup>62</sup>Florentino Garcia Martinez, “The Rule of the Community,” in *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English* (New York: E. J. Brill, 1994) , Col VI: 1-6

<sup>63</sup>C. Marvin Pate, *Communities of the Last Days: The Dead Sea Scrolls, the New Testament & the Story of Israel* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000) , 142, 143.

As has been mentioned earlier, communal meals was also common among pagan religions in the ancient world. In the Greco-Roman pagan religions, communal meals accompanied sacrifices to the gods and this was a major part of their religion.<sup>64</sup> We also have evidence of this practice in the book of first Corinthians 8 and 10 where Paul was dealing with issues of meat offered to idols. During religious festivals among the pagans, banquets would often be provided for the populace at large.<sup>65</sup> Generally, banquets had two major parts, “the *deipnon*, or eating part, and the *symposion* (symposium) or drinking part.”<sup>66</sup> In some cases the meal began with an “appetizer course” similar to the one found in the Passover meal. Between the two major parts, there was a formal transition of “a wine ceremony, in which wine was poured out to the god.”<sup>67</sup> The pouring of libation to the god or gods and other religious ceremonies, such as singing of hymn” marked the beginning of the second part, symposium.<sup>68</sup> The symposium was the real time of wine drinking accompanied by all kinds of entertainments. The entertainments vary from traditional games to discussions, dialogues and worship. In the philosophical schools and religions associations, the symposium entertainment would take the form of philosophical discussion or a community worship respectively.<sup>69</sup> The banquet became the most often used form of communal meal, during religions rituals, “because it was the

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<sup>64</sup> Wendel Lee Willis, *Idol Meat in Corinth: The Pauline Argument in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10*. Society of Biblical Literature, no. 68 (Chico, California: Scholars Press, 1985) , 10, 13.

<sup>65</sup>Smith, “Greco-Roman Meal Custom,” 651.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

<sup>67</sup>Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 244.

<sup>68</sup>Smith. “Greco-Rome Meal Customs,” 652.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

formalized meal par excellence.”<sup>70</sup> The religious nature in such cases of the banquet will depend on the religious inclination of the group involved.

“Thus the Jewish Passover meal, the Christian Eucharist and agape, the Greek and Roman meals of religious associations, as well as the ubiquitous sacrificial meal were all meals with special religious significance that also were structured as standard Greco-Roman banquets.”<sup>71</sup>

In a religious pluralistic society such as Corinth, there were many such banquets with religious inclinations. And it would have been culturally acceptable to attend different religious banquets. This might explain why the Corinthian Christians were partaking of both the table of the Lord and the table of demons.<sup>72</sup> We need to appreciate the fact that the Corinthian Christians would have faced very difficult choices. Attending these banquets, whether religious or not, became occasions “for gaining or showing ones social status.”<sup>73</sup>

Witherington adds that such gaining or showing of ones social status is likely to be a “microcosm of the aspirations and aims of the culture as a whole.”<sup>74</sup> In such a situation then, the Corinthian believers of high social ranking would have found it very difficult not to attend such banquets.

The early Christian Church was not left behind when it came to communal meals.

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid. 653.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid. 653.

<sup>72</sup>See 1 Cor.10: 21.

<sup>73</sup>Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 244.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid. 244.

But as we mentioned earlier, the Christian communal meals have Jewish communal meals as its background. Luke records in the book of Acts various times at which the believers ate communally. In Acts 2: 42, we read that “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, *to the breaking of bread* and to prayer.”<sup>75</sup> Also in 2:46 we read; “They *broke bread in their homes and ate together* with glad and sincere hearts...”<sup>76</sup> In Acts 20:7,11, Luke mentions that they met on the first day of the week and broke bread and ate together with the people. Jude also mentions love feasts, which the believers eat together.<sup>77</sup> The most prominent communal meal in the early Church was the Lord’s Supper which served both as an “identity marker” and “a boundary marker.”<sup>78</sup> As an “identity marker,” because it clearly identified the Christian community. And as a “boundary marker,” because non-Christians were not admitted to it. This important praxis of the Church needs to be discussed further for it is our main concern in this research.

### **Origin of the Lord’s Supper**

The celebration of the Lord’s Supper began on the night on which Jesus was betrayed by Judas Ischariot. It was on that night that Jesus ate the last supper or meal with his disciples. The Synoptics accounts of the last supper is set against the background of the Passover feast.

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<sup>75</sup>Emphasis mine.

<sup>76</sup>Emphasis mine.

<sup>77</sup>Jud. 12.

<sup>78</sup> James D.G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1998) , 612.

Matt 26:17-19

On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "*Where do you want us to make preparations for you to eat the Passover?*" He replied, "Go into the city to a certain man and tell him, 'The Teacher says: My appointed time is near. *I am going to celebrate the Passover with my disciples at your house.*'" *So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them and prepared the Passover.*<sup>79</sup>

Mark 14:12-16

On the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus' disciples asked him, "Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?" So he sent two of his disciples, telling them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him. Say to the owner of the house he enters, 'The Teacher asks: *Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?*' He will show you a large upper room, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there." The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. *So they prepared the Passover.*<sup>80</sup>

Lk 22:7-13 says;

Then came the day of Unleavened Bread on which the Passover lamb had to be sacrificed. Jesus sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and make preparations for us to eat the Passover." "Where do you want us to prepare for it?" they asked. He replied, "As you enter the city, a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him to the house that he enters, and say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks: Where is the guest room, *where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?*' He will show you a large upper room, all furnished. Make preparations there." They left and found things just as Jesus had told them. *So they prepared the Passover.*<sup>81</sup>

We have quoted these passages in full in order to let the evangelists speak for themselves and to give a clear picture. We see from the above Synoptic narratives that Jesus ate the Last Supper as a Passover meal. Paul does not mention anything about the Passover in his Corinthian epistle. He simply says that "the Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed,..."<sup>82</sup> But we know from the gospels that Jesus was betrayed during the celebration of the Passover festival. Hence, the setting is still the

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<sup>79</sup>Emphasis mine.

<sup>80</sup>Emphasis mine.

<sup>81</sup>Emphasis mine.

<sup>82</sup>1 Cor 11:23.

Passover period. The Fourth gospel does not explicitly call the Last Supper as a Passover meal but rather an “evening meal” which Jesus and his disciples ate just before the Passover Feast.<sup>83</sup> This narrative of John has caused division among scholars with some saying that the Last Supper was just an ordinary Jewish meal while others insist that it was a Passover meal.<sup>84</sup> The traditional view has been that the Last Supper was a Passover meal. The researcher favors the traditional view on the grounds that the overwhelming evidence supports it and in the absence of a compelling opposition, it should be kept. Jeremias, taking the traditional position, has given the following persuasive fourteen reasons why the Last Supper must be seen as a Passover meal.<sup>85</sup> These are:

1. Jesus and his disciples ate the meal in Jerusalem, which is where the Passover meal is to be eaten. Ordinary meals could be eaten any where but not the Passover meal.
2. Mark records that the room for the meal was readily given to Jesus and his disciples, something which happens in Jerusalem only during the time of the Passover and not at other times.
3. Jesus and his disciples ate the meal at night, which was not the customary time of eating ordinary meals except the Passover meal. Ordinary meals were eaten in the evening not at night.
4. Jesus ate the meal with the twelve, and the Passover meal is to have at least ten people. This point does not by itself prove much but taken together with the others, it carries weight.

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<sup>83</sup>Jn 13: 1,2.

<sup>84</sup>Hyam Maccoby, “Paul and the Eucharist,” *New Testament Studies* 37 (1991) : 247-267. He for example, does not see it as a Passover meal.

<sup>85</sup>Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, 42-62.

5. Jesus and his disciples reclined at the table, which is not the practice for an ordinary meal. But at the Passover meal it was a “*ritual duty* to recline at table as a symbol of freedom.”<sup>86</sup> We need not push this point too far because there were other times that Jesus reclined at table with the Pharisees and Simon without any reference to it being at a Passover.<sup>87</sup> So it was not only at the Last Supper that he reclined at table.
6. John 13:10 records that Jesus and his disciples ate the meal “*in a state of levitical purity*.”<sup>88</sup> This is not required for ordinary meals but is a requirement for the Passover meal.
7. Mark and Matthew record that Jesus “*broke the bread during the course of the meal*.”<sup>89</sup> Ordinary meals begin with the breaking of bread, not in the course of it. But during the Passover meal the bread is broken in the course of the meal.
8. Wine was part of the Last Supper, which is mandatory in a Passover meal. Ordinarily, water was drunk but wine was taken only for medicinal purposes. Also ordinarily, wine was not part of the normal daily meal.
9. The wine they drank was red wine. This is unusual given the rarity of red wines, unless as part of the Passover as required.
10. John 13:29 records that the other disciples thought that Judas, who left quickly after the meal, was rushing “*to make some last-minute purchases for the festival*.”<sup>90</sup> Such a rush to purchase at night would be illogical on other nights but on that particular Passover feast such a purchase will make sense “*because the*

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<sup>86</sup>Ibid. . 49.

<sup>87</sup>Cf. Mt 26:7; Mk 14:3; Lk 7:36; 11:37.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid. . 49.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid.

<sup>90</sup>Ibid. . 53.



*next day, Nisan 15, was a high feast day, and the day following that, Nisan 16, a Sabbath.*”<sup>91</sup>

11. John also mentions, in John 13:29, that some of the disciples had thought that Jesus had asked “*Judas to give something to the poor*”, despite the fact that it was at night.<sup>92</sup> Such giving to the poor at night would be unusual at other times but on a Passover night it was customary.
12. Matthew and Mark record that at the end of the Last Supper, Jesus and his disciples sang a hymn which is a reference to “the second half of the passover *hallel*.”<sup>93</sup>
13. After the meal Jesus spent the night at Gethsemane, which was part of Jerusalem, without returning to Bethany. This was due to the fact that the “night of the passover had to be spent in Jerusalem” but Bethany was outside of Jerusalem.<sup>94</sup>
14. Jesus spoke “*words of interpretation over the bread and the wine*”<sup>95</sup> For Jeremias, this is “the convincing argument for the paschal character of the Last Supper” because the “*interpretation of the special elements of the meal is a fixed part of the passover ritual*”.<sup>96</sup> Words of interpretation was never part of ordinary meals; people just gave thanks or blessed God for the food.

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<sup>91</sup>Ibid. . 53.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid. , 55.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid. , 49.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid. , 55,56.

Wright, Thiselton, Marshall et al, following Jeremias have argued for viewing the Last Supper as a paschal meal.<sup>97</sup> The fact that the Last Supper was a Passover meal helps to connect the Christian story with the Jewish one. Theissen and Merz (among others) have voiced a “criticism of the interpretation of the last meal as a Passover meal.”<sup>98</sup> It is beyond the scope of this study to look at the objections of viewing the Last Supper as a Passover meal.<sup>99</sup>

We will now briefly look at the Passover feast to get a grasp of what happens in it. The Passover started in Egypt when God struck the firstborn sons of the Egyptians but spared the lives of the Israelites. At that night, God delivered Israel from the oppression of the Egyptians.<sup>100</sup> The Israelites were to celebrate this great deliverance annually. The celebration continued for many years until after the exile when it gained additional focus. In addition to recalling the past, the Passover became an occasion to look forward into the future for God to restore the fortunes of Israel by sending the Messiah. This was due to the fact that Israel as a nation became subjected to foreign rule, domination and oppression. The foreign powers range from Babylon, Persia, and Greece, to Rome. The Romans were the foreign rulers of Israel at the time of Jesus. The Passover then became an occasion to recall the past and look into the future with hope. But it was more than that, for it also focused on the present. As each family celebrated it, individual members of the family were to regard themselves

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<sup>97</sup>N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996) , 554-562; Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 756-760; Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper*, 57-75.

<sup>98</sup>Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide*, (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998) , 426-427.

<sup>99</sup>For a comprehensive handling of the objections, see Jeremias. *Eucharistic Words*, 62-84.

<sup>100</sup>Exo. 11-13. 12: 1-14 specifically deals with the celebration of this deliverance.

as having personally come out of Egypt.<sup>101</sup> This means that the feast brings together the past, the present and the future. The celebration included the slaughtering of a lamb by each family. In the course of the meal, the head of the household “holds in his hand a loaf and recites a formula which is drawn from Deuteronomy xvi, 3.”<sup>102</sup> Also during the meal one of the children will ask why this particular night is so different from the others. The head of the household then narrates the Exodus story and explains how the Passover began. The program for the evening meal is as follows:<sup>103</sup>

#### Evening: The Passover Meal

1. Preliminary Course

Blessing of festival day (Kiddush) spoken over  
First Cup of wine.  
Dish of green herbs, bitter herbs and fruit sauce.

2. Passover liturgy:

The Passover narrative (*haggadah*)  
Singing of Psalm 113 (the little *hallel*)  
Second cup of wine.

3. Main Meal:

Grace spoken over the bread  
Meal of lamb, unleavened bread, bitter herbs.  
Grace spoken over  
*Third cup of wine (cup of blessing).*<sup>104</sup>

4. Conclusion:

Singing of Psalms 114-118 (the great *hallel*)  
Grace spoken over  
Fourth cup of wine.

Night: Watching and remembrance.

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<sup>101</sup>Cf. Exo. 13: 8; Deut. 6: 20-23. Rabbinic sources inform us that in each generation, every Israelite must regard himself as if he came out of Egypt. The Mishnah, tractate Pesachim x, 5.

<sup>102</sup>Ralph P. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1974), 114.

<sup>103</sup>Taken entirely from a table by Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper*, table 1 in the appendix.

<sup>104</sup>Emphasis mine. This was the cup Jesus blessed after supper. See 1 Cor. 10:16.

As we endorse the view that the Last Supper must be viewed as a paschal meal of some sort, we need to point out that it was more than a paschal meal. For Jesus gave it a new meaning from what it used to be. As we have mentioned earlier, the Passover is a commemoration of Israel's deliverance from tyranny in Egypt by a mighty act of God. In the Last Supper, Jesus re-interpreted this story of Israel and wove it around Himself. He retold the Jewish story around Himself giving a clear indication that a new exodus was taking place from a metaphorical Egypt, sin. Wright sums it well: "the meal brought Jesus' own kingdom-movement to its climax. It indicated that the new exodus, and all that it meant, was happening in and through Jesus himself."<sup>105</sup> Carmichael has also argued that Jesus used the meal to reveal Himself as the long-awaited Messiah<sup>106</sup> All these mean that the Last Supper, which Jesus ate with his disciples, was a type of a Passover meal but it was more than that. Perhaps this explains why the NT writers looked at it in different ways with some (such as the Synoptic writers) connecting it directly with the Passover and others (such as John) distinguishing between the two.<sup>107</sup> This might also explain why the early Christian community celebrated the Lord's Supper (which was a commemoration of Jesus' last supper) not annually but almost on a weekly basis or perhaps on daily basis.<sup>108</sup>

From this section, we gather that the Lord's Supper originated with Jesus when he ate the last meal with his disciples in the upper room. He ate that meal as a Passover meal but transformed it and "loaded" it with a new message of God's mighty act of

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<sup>105</sup>Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 557.

<sup>106</sup> Deborah Bleicher Carmichael, "David Daube on the Eucharist and the Passover Seder," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 42 (1991): 45-67.

<sup>107</sup>Cf. Welker who holds a similar view. Michael Welker, *What Happens in the Holy Communion* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2000), 51.

<sup>108</sup>Cf. Acts 2: 42-47.

deliverance and hope for the future for a new people or community of God.<sup>109</sup> This new community of God, later called the Church or Christians, continued to celebrate this transformed ceremony which Jesus instituted on the night of his betrayal. That the Lord's Supper is a celebration of the Last Supper (of Jesus) is evident from the fact that Paul referred to it in his letter to the Corinthian Church. In 1 Cor 11:23 Paul refers to the Last Supper in his discussion of the Lord's Supper. Obviously, Paul must have taught the Corinthian Church to celebrate this ceremony.

The Corinthian Church, founded by Paul, was part of this new people of God. But their celebration of the Lord's Supper was not the way Paul expected of God's people. Such a problem might be a result of the fact that many of the Corinthian believers were Gentiles hence their knowledge and understanding of table-fellowships was shaped by Greco-Roman beliefs and practices. We have earlier mentioned that these revolve around idolatry, sexual immorality, class distinctions, pride and competitive spirit. Winter has shown that the Corinthian believers' approach to various issues (including meal eating) was largely shaped by Greco-Roman secular ethics and social change.<sup>110</sup> But on the other hand the Christian Lord's Supper had its roots in the Jewish Passover meal. Also, the Apostle Paul was a Jew so his Jewish background shaped his knowledge and understanding of table-fellowships. This becomes apparent when we consider the fact that Paul kept referring to Jewish beliefs and practices on various issues (including "meals") in his letter to them.<sup>111</sup> His letter

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<sup>109</sup>See Grehard Lohfink's discussion of this community of God in *Jesus and Community*. Translated by Herder Verlag (Philadelphia: Fortress Press. 1982).

<sup>110</sup>This was Winter's whole argument in his book *After Paul Left Corinth*.

<sup>111</sup>Cf. Cor10:2,3,18.

sought to address various problems ailing the Corinthian church. The letter was a deliberative rhetoric seeking to reunite the various factions found in the Church.

### **General Survey of I Corinthians.**

In I Corinthians Paul deals basically with specific problems found in the Corinthian Church. Some of these problems touch on leadership, morality, doctrine, worship, religion, culture and social class Christians.<sup>112</sup> These problems are caused by divisions in the Church and the whole book was written as a single letter to persuade them to reconcile and unite. Fee does not see the situation in the Corinthian Church primarily as one of division but rather as “one of conflict between the church and its founder.”<sup>113</sup> To him, the conflict concerns Paul’s authority as an apostle and the gospel he preached.<sup>114</sup> But we may have to say that even if there was a conflict between Paul and the Church there is no denying that even that conflict might be the cause of the factions. For in 1:12, there is evidence that Paul was one of the people on account of whom there was divisions. For some said they follow Paul while others said they follow other leaders. Hence, it is more appropriate to see factionalism as the underlying problem in the Corinthian church. Mitchell has argued convincingly that “I Corinthians is a unified deliberative letter which throughout urges unity on the divided Corinthian Church.”<sup>115</sup> We share this conviction and note that even though portions of the book may be studied, the conclusions arrived at must cohere with the whole book. In other words, it is erroneous to treat the book as if it is a disjointed

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<sup>112</sup> Simon J. Kistemaker, *I Corinthians. New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1993) , 10-12.

<sup>113</sup> Fee, *First Epistle*, 6. See his arguments for this view on pages 5-15.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.* , 6.

<sup>115</sup> Margaret. M. Mitchell, *Paul and the Rhetoric of Reconciliation: An Exegetical Investigation of the Language and Composition of I Corinthians* (Louisville, Kentucky: John Knox Press, 1991) , 296.

pieces of advice from Paul to the Corinthian Church. We need to see the book as a unified whole. In that spirit then, before we look at our selected passages; 10:14-22; 11:17-34, we shall do a general survey of the entire book. But before we do a survey, we need to note the style and nature of the letter.

Paul's letter to the Corinthians followed the conventional letter writing of ancient times. Witherington has shown that letters from the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. to 4<sup>th</sup> century A.D. had the following parts:<sup>116</sup>

1. The name of the writer,
2. The name of the addressee,
3. A greeting,
4. The body of the letter, which included a thanksgiving or wish prayer, then an introductory formula, followed by the substance of the letter, sometimes followed by an eschatological conclusion or a travelogue,
5. Ethical or practical advice, and
6. A conclusion with final greetings, benediction, and sometimes a description of how the letter was written.

We note that 1 Corinthians generally follows this structure of ancient letters:

1. 1:1: Name of writer – Paul
2. 1:2: Name of the addressee – Church of God in Corinth
3. 1:3: Greeting – Grace and peace to you
4. 1:4 – 9: Thanksgiving
5. 1:10 – 16:4: Main body of letter
6. 16:5-24: Conclusion, including some personal requests and final greetings.

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<sup>116</sup>This is entirely taken from his book *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 37.

Apart from following the ancient letter–writing style, Paul’s letter was rhetoric in nature. Rhetoric is “the art of effective or persuasive speaking or writing.”<sup>117</sup> It was very popular in the Greco-Roman world at Paul’s time.<sup>118</sup> Witherington mentions three types of rhetoric, namely: “*forensic*, which was concerned with accusations and defense and thus focused on the past, *deliberative*, the true art of persuasion or discussion, which was future oriented, and *epideitic*, which was concerned with giving praise or blame in order to encourage agreement with or rejection of some value and was usually focused on the present.”<sup>119</sup> He goes on to say that a speaker or writer “could mix these types of rhetoric in a speech in order to convey a point.”<sup>120</sup> Of the three types, Paul’s letter of 1 Corinthians was a deliberative one.<sup>121</sup> And in keeping with the argumentation of deliberative rhetoric, Paul gave both negative and positive examples (of Israel and himself). As Mitchell says “The deliberative proof by example functions with an implicit or even explicit appeal to imitate the illustrious example (or avoid the negative example).”<sup>122</sup> She goes on to say that: “In 1 Corinthians, in line with other deliberative arguments, Paul employs proofs by example.”<sup>123</sup>

Paul began his letter with a Salutation in which he greeted the church and informed them about his continuous prayer of thanks for them because of their giftedness in

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<sup>117</sup> *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, 8th ed., s.v. “Rhetoric.”

<sup>118</sup> See Witherington, *Conflict and Community in Corinth*, 41.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> Mitchell, *Paul and Rhetoric of Reconciliation*, 1.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.



spiritual gifts (1:1-9). After the salutation, Paul first dealt with the problems of schisms, lawsuits and immorality as per the report he got from Chloe's household. He dealt with these problems in chapters one to six. In chapters one to four, there was factionalism relating to Christian leaders. The schism was due to what Gundry refers to as "hero worship" in which various factions held allegiance to various Christian leaders such as Paul, Apollos, Cephas and even Christ: 1:2.<sup>124</sup> Paul responds to this problem by pointing out that Christ is not divided and neither are Christ's servants divided. The Corinthians were to be united as God's people because a divided group is a worldly or carnal group, not a spiritual one (3: 1-4). They are to know that they are a community of believers, God's people, and must not destroy that community. Paul uses the imagery of a farming field and a temple to make his point about the Church as a community of believers. As a community of believers, they are God's field and the servants of Christ are the workers who plant and watered the seed but it was God who gave the growth. Here Paul planted and Apollos watered but it was God who gave the growth. For that reason neither Paul or Apollos is anything, "but only God, who makes things grow" 3: 7. As a community of believers, they are individually and corporately God's temple in which God's Spirit lives, 6:19 and 3:16. This temple of God is holy and for that reason God will not spare anyone who destroys it. Here, Paul gives them a hint of God's judgment when people do not live in ways that sustain the unity of the community of believers.

In chapter five, there was factionalism about sexual morality, which came to Paul's attention. He scolded the church for their aloofness about a clear case of sexual immorality. A member of the Church was committing sexual immorality with his

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<sup>124</sup> Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), 264.

father's wife and the congregation was not doing anything about it, 5:1. In dealing with this case, Paul classified the immoral person with the greedy, idolaters, slanderers, drunkards, or swindlers, in 5:11. He commands them not to associate or *eat* with a person who claims to be a brother (and we may add "or sister") but practices any of the above-mentioned evils. The use of μηδε συνεσθιειν "not even eat" would mean that the prohibition is not restricted to the Holy Communion but goes beyond it to other meals.<sup>125</sup> They are to expel such a person "from the fellowship of the church i.e., social ostracism and exclusion from the Lord's Supper."<sup>126</sup> The "eating" here refers to table-fellowship, which includes the Lord's Supper.<sup>127</sup> Robertson and Plummer do not see the prohibition here as referring to the Holy Communion but add that "a prohibition of this kind would lead to the exclusion of the offender from the Lord's Table."<sup>128</sup> This means that Paul would expect the Church to deny such people from partaking of the Lord's Supper.

Before continuing with the problem of sexual immorality, Paul digresses a bit to deal with the issue of lawsuits in their midst. In chapter six, the factionalism had gone so far that some were actually taking other believers to secular courts. He rebuked them for taking each other to secular courts to be judged by unbelievers. They were to solve these problems among themselves through the arbitration of fellow believers. As believers, they are wise enough to solve their own problems because after all they are

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<sup>125</sup>Cf. Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 415.

<sup>126</sup>Grundy, *A Survey of the New Testament*, 265.

<sup>127</sup>See Bruce's comment on this verse 5:11. F. F. Bruce, *I & II Corinthians*. New Century Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), 59

<sup>128</sup>Archibald Robertson and Alfred Plummer, *First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*. 2d ed. The International Critical Commentary, ed. Samuel R. Driver, Alfred Plummer and Charles A. Briggs (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1967), 107.

the ones to judge the angels. Otherwise it is better to be wronged than to go to a secular court. He then continues with the discussion about sexual immorality by commanding them to “flee sexual immorality” (6:18). His rationale for such a command is that sexual immorality is wickedness against ones own body, and those who practice it will not inherit God’s Kingdom. Since their bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit, they must glorify God with their bodies.

From chapter seven onwards, Paul dealt with the issues they raised in their letter. They had written about marriage, idolatry, worship, spiritual gifts, the resurrection of the dead and collection for God’s people. In chapter seven, the factionalism related to marriage, right from whether one should be single to whether a Christian can divorce his or her unbelieving spouse. Paul’s advice about marriage is that it is better to be single than to marry. But since God’s will for each person in marital issues is different, each person must seek and pursue God’s will for their lives, whether to marry or to remain single. Those married must remain in marriage till death without divorcing, even if they were married to unbelievers before they became Christians. Unless the unbeliever wants divorce, they must remain in the marriage.

In chapters eight to ten, the factionalism concerns idolatry. The problem of idolatry touch on the rights of a believer to eat food dedicated to idols and eating at the altars or temples of pagan gods. There were supposedly strong believers who thought that idols were nothing and so it was okay to eat such foods. But the weak believers thought otherwise. Paul responds (in chapter 8) that there should be a balance between freedom to eat and walking in love towards the weak believers. His discussion, of eating meat offered to idols, sought to preserve the harmony and unity

of the Church as a community. By referring to the weak believer as a brother, he was showing them that as a Christian community, they are a family.<sup>129</sup> The strong members of the community must not live only to please themselves but must be concerned about the welfare of the weak members. This is because Christ died for the weak also and any action which will ruin them and “hurt their conscience” is a sin against Christ himself. From this Paul was pointing out that every believer (including the weak brother) is precious in God’s sight.<sup>130</sup> In discussing the freedom of the Christian, Paul gave himself as an example (in chapter 9) and explained how he had not been using his freedom as an Apostle to his own selfish ends but rather to serve the people of God. As Paul urged them to be united in accordance with the gospel, he gave himself as an example to be emulated. We had earlier mentioned that in rhetoric, examples are used either positively or negatively. Here, at the end of chapter eight and in the whole of chapter nine, Paul used himself as a positive example worthy of emulation. Hence, he showed them that as an apostle, he has not been exercising his rights but rather sought to serve all people, for the sake of the gospel. From a positive example of himself, worthy of emulation, Paul moves on to give a negative example that should be shunned. He took the negative example from the history of the nation Israel. The first part of chapter ten (10:1-13) dealt with the negative example. From the examples of himself and Israel, he then returned to the factionalism relating to idolatry in 10:14-22. But this time, he dealt with the issue by comparing it with the Lord’s Supper and another example from the nation of Israel. He dedicated the rest of chapter ten (23-33) to the eating of meat offered to idols. But here again he gave himself as a positive example worthy of emulation. We had earlier

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<sup>129</sup>He later on in 10:17, explains that this community of believers is one.

<sup>130</sup>Cf. Bruce, *I & II Corinthians*, 82.

mentioned that Paul was urging them to unite. We need to note that in factionalism, people tend to seek their own good and the good of their “group.” But in unity, people tend to seek the good of all or of the many. It is for this reason that as he gave himself as a positive example Paul says “ Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the Church of God even as I try to please everybody. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved” (32-33). In order to leave no doubt that he was using himself as a positive example worthy of emulation, he says in 11:1, “follow my example of Christ”. From this statement, Paul was showing them that his example goes back to Christ and that Christ stands for unity, not factionalism.

From chapters eleven to fourteen, Paul dealt with the factionalism which relates to the church in worship. The issues of worship includes propriety, the Lord’s supper and spiritual gifts. Paul calls for women to cover their heads when they pray and prophecy, but for men to uncover their heads when they do the same (11:1-16) in order to show propriety. He goes on to decry the division between the haves and the have-nots during their table fellowships (11:17-34). He reminds them that the Lord’s Supper must never be an occasion for discrimination but rather of brotherly attention and care for one another. This is because the partaking of the Lord’s Supper is a proclamation of the Lord’s death till he comes. Eating it inappropriately then brings judgement from God which is why some of the Corinthian believers “are weak, sick and a number of you have fallen asleep” (11:30). He therefore admonished them to be considerate towards one another by waiting for each other so that their meeting and eating together will not result in judgement. In dealing with spiritual gifts, Paul points out that the Holy Spirit gave spiritual gifts to the church for the sake of unity

## CHAPTER THREE

### PAUL'S RESPONSE TO ISSUES ABOUT THE LORD'S SUPPER.

The main issues which prompted Paul to write to the Corinthians about the Holy Communion are (i) Idolatry in the Church, which he addressed in 10: 14-22 and (ii) Social injustice through division and discrimination in the Church, which he addressed in 11: 17-34. These two issues are manifestations of the factionalism, which has been the fundamental problem in the Church. Regarding idolatry, the presumably strong believers were attending feasts in pagan temples, something the presumably weak believers might have thought inappropriate.<sup>1</sup> Such a practice of eating cultic meals in pagan temples amounted to dining with demons and thus undermined the holiness of the Church. The second issue, which touches on the Lord's Supper, is the division of the Church along social lines of the "haves" and the "have-nots". This clear manifestation of factionalism has risen because the "haves" or the rich among them were discriminating against the "have-nots" (or the poor among them) at the Lord's Supper. This social discrimination was shaming the poor and thus undermining the unity of the Church. Paul deals with that in 1 Cor. 11: 17-34. We now turn our attention to the issue of idolatry.

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<sup>1</sup> That there are presumably strong and weak believers in the Church can be inferred from 1 Cor. 8: 11.

### **Idolatry in the Church: 1 Cor. 10:14-22.**

In this passage, Paul uses several illustrations to show that idolatry and the believer's walk with the Lord are incompatible. The major of these illustrations is the Lord's Supper, concerning which Paul made three main points.

#### 1. Those who partake of the Lord's Supper are Communal Participants with Christ (10: 14-18).

**Verse 14:** Διόπερ, ἀγαπητοί μου, φεύγετε ἀπὸ τῆς εἰδωλολατρίας.

**Verse 15:** ὡς φρονίμοις λέγω· κρίνατε ὑμεῖς ὃ φημι.

**Verse 16:** τὸ ποτήριον τῆς εὐλογίας ὃ εὐλογοῦμεν, οὐχὶ κοινωνία ἐστὶν τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ; τὸν ἄρτον ὃν κλῶμεν, οὐχὶ κοινωνία τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ ἐστὶν;

**Verse 17:** ὅτι εἷς ἄρτος, ἐν σῶμα οἱ πολλοὶ ἐσμεν, οἱ γὰρ πάντες ἐκ τοῦ ἑνὸς ἄρτου μετέχομεν.

**Verse 18:** βλέπετε τὸν Ἰσραὴλ κατὰ σάρκα· οὐχὶ οἱ ἐσθίοντες τὰς θυσίας κοινωνοὶ τοῦ θυσιαστηρίου εἰσὶν;

14. For this very reason, my beloved, flee from idolatry. 15. I am speaking as to sensible people, judge for yourselves what I am declaring. 16. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ? 17. Because there is one bread, we the many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. 18. Consider natural Israel: Those who ate the sacrifices, are they not participants in the altar?"

In this passage, Paul teaches that those who partake of the Lord's Supper are communal participants with Christ or are joined together with Christ and with their fellow believers with whom they partake of the Lord's Supper. Since his main concern was with the issue of idolatry, he commands them to flee from idolatry. The word διόπερ which begins the passage means "therefore" or "for this very reason" and refers back to 10:6-10 which touches on Israel's idolatry in the wilderness. The word is used only here and 8:13 in the New Testament. Διόπερ could also be referring to verse 13, in which case then it will mean that Paul is now telling them that one of

the temptations they are facing is idolatry. And that as much as God will deliver them from the temptation of idolatry, they “must not deliberately go into temptation and then expect deliverance. They must not try how near they can go, but how far they can fly.”<sup>2</sup> For this reason they are to flee from the temptation of idolatry. Απο which means “from” is a preposition with the genitive of separation (ειδωλολατριας), indicating a “movement away from”, in this case a movement away from idolatry.<sup>3</sup> The phrase “flee from idolatry” is similar in tone to the command Paul gave in 6:18 that they “flee from immorality.” The fleeing from idolatry is also similar to John’s admonition (in 1 Jn 5:21) to the believers to “guard yourselves from idols.” The word φευγετε has the root meaning “to flee” or to “take flight.”<sup>4</sup> The “fleeing” includes shunning every form of idolatrous activity and having nothing to do with idolatry. The word φευγετε is a second person plural present imperative making it a command which all of them are to obey as a matter of practice. They are commanded to shun every form of idolatry. Believers are to move away from idolatry by fleeing. Ειδωλολατριας has the root meaning “a form, shape, figure; image or statute; hence, an idol, image of a god.”<sup>5</sup> The word then means “idolatry” or the “worship of idols.”<sup>6</sup> Idolatry was a “common pagan religious phenomenon of Paul’s day in which images or material symbols of deities or other supernatural powers were the objects of worship.”<sup>7</sup> Paul’s reaction to the issue of idolatry is because of his

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<sup>2</sup>Robertson and Plummer. *I Corinthians*, 211.

<sup>3</sup>See Stanley E. Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 2d. ed. Biblical Languages: Greek 2. (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999) , 146.

<sup>4</sup> Harold K. Moulton, *The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1990) , 424.

<sup>5</sup>Moulton, *The Analytical Greek Lexicon*, 117.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> P. W. Comfort, “Idolatry,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald F. Hawthorne,



deep-rooted Jewish monotheistic background, which is very much opposed to idolatry. He mentions the problem of idolatry in his other letters, but it is only in 1 Corinthians that he has given it an extensive coverage. This shows the magnitude of the problem in Corinth. In his other letters, he “links idolatry in all of its forms, both literal and metaphorical (i.e., the desire for anything more than God; cf. Mt 6:24), with sorcery and other ‘works of the flesh,’ against which Christians must constantly be warned and from which they must continually flee (Gal 5:19–21; cf. 1 Cor 10:14).”<sup>8</sup> His treatment of the subject in Rom. 1:18–32, shows that idolatry is the cause of “sexual immorality... and every other kind of sin, great or small...”<sup>9</sup> In Eph. 5:5, Paul goes further to point out that greediness or covetousness are forms of idolatry.<sup>10</sup> But in our passage under consideration, he is talking about the images, which are put up in pagan temples, as representation of pagan gods. By using *ειδωλολατρίας*, Paul was showing them that eating at the altar or temple of an idol is tantamount to worshipping the idols. This might explain the reason for the command to “flee”. Eating at the temple of an idol, blurs the distinction and boundary between the Christian community and pagans. It sends the wrong message, leaving the impression that “the all-important boundary between allegiance to idols and allegiance to the lordship of Christ has been compromised,...”<sup>11</sup> They ought to have known that allegiance to Christ and allegiance to demons are mutually exclusive.

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Ralph P. Martin and Daniel G. Reid. (Downer’s Grove, IL: IVP, 1998), [CD-Rom].

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Cf. Col 3:5.

<sup>11</sup>Comfort, “Idolatry.” [CD-Rom].

From verse 16 to verse 21, Paul brings out the sharp contrast between Lord's Supper and pagan cultic meals, with an illustration from Jewish sacrificial rites. They are to judge or consider these issues carefully by answering some few questions in verses 16, 18, 19 and 22. These questions Paul asked are deliberately nuanced, to force them to see the serious nature of idolatry. The first of the questions in verse 16 touches directly on the Eucharist. Godet's observation well summarizes the principle of Paul's argument in verses 16-21;

The following passages rest on these principles: that any religious act whatever brings us into communication with the spiritual world, that this exercises a power, and that the nature of the influence thus exercised depends each time on the character of the invisible Being to which the worship is thus addressed. Thus the Holy Supper brings the believer under the influence of Christ (vers. 16, 17); the Jewish sacrifice brings the Israelite into contact with the altar of Jehovah (ver. 18); and the heathen sacrificial feast brings man under the influence of the demons whose arts have given birth to idolatry.<sup>12</sup>

The phrase "cup of blessing" refers to the cup over which grace or thanksgiving is offered in the course of ordinary Jewish meals or hellenistic cultic meals or in the Passover meal. In this case it refers to the third cup of the Jewish Passover meal. We have already mentioned that the "cup of blessing" is the third cup of the four cups in the passover feast.<sup>13</sup> Ποτηριον means "a drinking vessel, cup or goblet."<sup>14</sup> In verse 16, Paul reverses the order of bread and wine by mentioning the wine first and the bread second. This might not be due to a different tradition of the Lord's Supper but

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<sup>12</sup> Federic L. Godet, *Commentary on First Corinthians*. Volume II. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1957), 75

<sup>13</sup> See our earlier discussion on the Lord's supper as passover meal on pages 29-31.

<sup>14</sup> H. Patsch, "ποτηριον" *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol 3. ed. Horst Balz. and Gerhard Schneider. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1993), 141.

rather because of the fact that he wanted to emphasize the bread and prove a point from it in the following verse.<sup>15</sup>

The two questions posed in verse 16 are rhetorical, expecting answers in the affirmative. This is because of his use of the word *οὐχι*. It assumes that these things are already known to them, for it was in anticipation of these questions and reasonings that Paul asked them to put on their “thinking caps” in verse 15. The word *ευλογιας* is a genitive of description to show what type or kind of cup he is referring to. Various meanings have been given to *το ποτηριον της ευλογιας*, “the cup of blessing”. Gingrich and Danker see it as “the cup whereby divine favor is shared.”<sup>16</sup> Bauer, Arnt and Gringrich see it as “the consecrated cup.”<sup>17</sup> The NIV Bible translates it as “the cup of thanksgiving,” but Fee has shown that, that misses the Hebraism of the phrase.<sup>18</sup> If we are to take the Lord’s Supper as having its origins in the context of a Passover meal, then “the cup of blessing” will be referring to the third cup of the Passover meal. As we have earlier mentioned, the Mishnah gives us some insight into the benediction over the wine for what the cup stands for. Berakoth 6:1 reads, “Blessed art thou... who createth the fruit of the vine.”<sup>19</sup> We see from this that the blessing is then directed to God and not to the people present or the cup. So the “cup of blessing” is the cup containing the wine for which Christians bless God. *Ευλογουμεν* means “we offer blessing.” But since the blessing is to God for the wine

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Kistenmaker, *I Corinthians*, 34.

<sup>16</sup>Gingrich and Danker, *Shorter Lexicon*, 81.

<sup>17</sup>Greek and English Lexicon, 323.

<sup>18</sup>Fee, *First Epistle*, 467.

<sup>19</sup> Herbert Danby, *The Mishnah* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993)

in the cup, it will be best to render the entire clause as, “the cup of blessing over which we offer blessing.”<sup>20</sup> This is the same cup Paul refers to in 1 Cor. 11:25.

By drinking of this cup the believers “share in the blood of Christ.” Thiselton translates *κοινωνία* as “communal participation” which helps to convey the idea that the community of believers participates in the cup with Christ.<sup>21</sup> Schattenmann sees *κοινωνία* as “participation” in the body and blood of Christ and thus union with the exalted Christ.<sup>22</sup>

Thiselton’s translation seems better because it brings out the communality of the participation, and frees the word from being translated in the individual sense. We will go further to say that “communal participation” means that the believers are joined or united to both Christ and to one another. The phrase “blood of Christ” refers literally to Christ’s blood, which he shed on the cross. *Χριστου* (of Christ) is a genitive of possession and relates to the word *αιματος*. This means that Paul is referring to the blood which belongs to Christ Himself. This is the blood Christ shed on the cross. In this case it signifies all that Christ’s sacrificial atoning work stands for. Most importantly it refers to the covenant which the believer entered into with God through the blood.<sup>23</sup> In Luke Jesus links the cup to his blood by a covenant (Lk. 22:20). So the participation is for all those things entailed in the covenant for which

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<sup>20</sup>Cf. Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 760.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 761.

<sup>22</sup>J. Schattenmann, “Fellowship,” in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 1., ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1975), 643.

<sup>23</sup>Cf. 11:25, Lk. 22:20.

the blood was shed.<sup>24</sup> Such a covenant sharing in the blood of Christ then prohibits the believer from sharing in idolatrous meals.

The sharing or communal participation is not only in the blood but also in the body. For Paul goes on to ask “The bread which we break is it not a participation in the body of Christ?” The breaking of bread is another expression for Christian fellowship meal, which they borrowed from Jewish meals.<sup>25</sup> The second Χριστου is also a genitive of possession but this time relates to the body, meaning Christ’s own body is in view here. But is it used in the metaphorical sense or in the literal sense? It is most unlikely that he meant the literal body of Christ. We have seen that in the case of the blood it was not in the literal sense but metaphorically, all that the blood ratified in the covenant. Elsewhere Paul refers to the Church as Christ’s body (meaning Christ’s spiritual body, Eph. 5:23, 30) and that Christ gave Himself up for her (verse 25). Paul goes on further to explain that Christ gave up his physical body for the sake of his spiritual body in order “to make it holy...and to present her to himself blameless” (verses 25-27). In this particular passage Paul uses the imagery of marriage, which will mean that one’s bride cannot get involved with another man. If we are to be informed by this passage, then it means that the body of Christ, which is his bride, is holy and blameless. A believer’s participation in this body (or bride) then forbids him or her from any other union with demons. Such an idea is similar to Fee’s explanation that by eating the bread, “they are herewith affirming that through Christ’s death they are ‘partners’ in the redeemed community, the new eschatological

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<sup>24</sup>Cf. Fee, *First Epistle*, 468.

<sup>25</sup>Acts 2:46, 10:7,11.

people of God.”<sup>26</sup> Also our view fits in with verse 17 where Paul asserts that the many are one because they partake of the one bread.

Having shown that the believers are united to Christ, Paul moves to show that they are also united with each other but that this unity is anchored in Christ. The  $\text{οτι}$  at the beginning of the sentence has a causal sense and seeks to throw light on what he has said in verse 16 (particularly v. 16b). The bread they have been breaking is one, not many. The sentence can be arranged as follows “We who are many are actually one body, because there is one bread and we all partake of this one bread.” The logic of the passage will be as follows: since we are one body (because of the fact that despite our being many we all partake of the one bread); and since that body is Christ’s body and that body is represented by one bread; therefore our breaking of the one bread is a communal participation in the body of Christ.

This logical flow of the argument from the end of verse 16b explains the use of the causal conjunction  $\text{οτι}$  at the beginning of verse 17. So even though Paul implied the unity of the body, yet his main point “is not the unity citadel of the body that this meal represents, (although it probably anticipates that concern as meal), but the solidarity of the redeemed community as one body in Christ that forbids all other such unions.”<sup>27</sup> The word  $\text{μετεχομεν}$  is a progressive present, indicating that the practice which started in the past had continued into the present. The word has the root meaning “to share” or “to participate in or of something.”<sup>28</sup> The sharing or

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid. , 469.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid. , 469.

<sup>28</sup> Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich, *Greek –English Lexicon*, 514.

participation can refer to either eating or drinking.<sup>29</sup> We follow Thiselton in taking πολλοι to be a subordinate concessive because Paul was making a concession that though they are many yet they are one.<sup>30</sup> In verse 16 he equated Christ with the body but now here in the verse 17 he equates the Church with the body. He is using the Church-body equation to prove his point that when believers share in the bread they confirm their union with Christ and with each other. In order to make his point clearer, he now turns to Israel and takes an example from the Jewish sacrificial system.

Paul takes the argument to the O.T practices (and most likely Jewish practices in his time) of the sacrificial system. Βλεπετε here is dealing with the “mental functions” hence refers to directing “ones attention to something” in order to consider. Paul’s use of κατα σαρκα “according to the flesh” may imply a contrast with the church as “spiritual Israel.”<sup>31</sup> In the Jewish sacrificial system, all who eat the sacrificial meal are considered to be partners in the altar. The phrase Ισραηλ κατα σαρκα can mean “physical Israel,” “outward Israel” or “Israel of earthly descent.”<sup>32</sup> It is likely that Paul is having all of these ideas about Israel in mind and is referring to Israel right through history till his time. This reference to Israel is a further development of the example he gave about Israel in 10: 1-12. But here he uses Israel as an example in a positive way in order to draw a parallel between the two sacrificial systems (that of Israel and that of the pagans). Various O.T passages such as Lev. 7:11-18; 10: 12-15, Num. 18:8-13, Deut. 12:5-7; 18:1-8 and many others indicate that those who eat the

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid. , 514.

<sup>30</sup>Cf. Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 767.

<sup>31</sup>Cf. Gal. 6:16. Also Godet, *First Corinthians*, 861.

<sup>32</sup>Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 771.

sacrificial meal whether the priests, Levites or lay worshippers become partners in the altar.<sup>33</sup> The “communion or sharer with the altar” refers to communion or sharing with the God to whom the altar belongs.<sup>34</sup> We see in Mal. 1: 1-14, that those who presented profane and diseased animals on the altar dishonored God. This is because the altar belongs to God and any sacrifice offered on that altar is to Him. Paul’s use of *οὐχί* at the beginning of this question, implies that he was expecting a positive answer.<sup>35</sup> They will find it difficult to give him an affirmative answer because this kind of argument (of the whole of verse 18) will look absurd to them and they will be wondering whether Paul is not contradicting himself since earlier on he had agreed with them that an idol is nothing (8: 4-6). To this, Paul explains (in verse 19) that he is not in any way contradicting himself.

From this section, we gather that the celebration of the Lord’s Supper is a covenantal union between the believer and Christ and the believer and other believers. It is on the basis of that union, as demonstrated in the Lord’s Supper, that believers are commanded to flee from idolatry (which seeks to entice them in the form of pagan cultic meals). Paul now goes on to show (in verses 19-21) that the union demonstrated in the Lord’s Supper is incompatible with the union demonstrated in the pagan cultic meals.

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<sup>33</sup>Bruce, *1 & 2 Corinthians*, 95. Bruce also see a parallel in Philo, 5 pec Leg1:221, “to whom such a partner in the altars is also sharer in a common table.”

<sup>34</sup>Cf. Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 172.

<sup>35</sup>See Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 278.



2. Those who partake of the Lord's Supper must not partake of pagan cultic meals (10: 19-21).

**Verse 19:** τί οὖν φημί; ὅτι εἰδωλόθυτον τί ἐστὶν ἢ ὅτι εἰδωλον τί ἐστὶν;

**Verse 20:** ἀλλ' ὅτι ἃ θύουσιν, δαιμονίοις καὶ οὐ Θεῷ [θυουσίν]- οὐ θέλω δὲ ὑμᾶς κοινωνοὺς τῶν δαιμονίων γίνεσθαι.

**Verse 21:** οὐ δύνασθε ποτήριον Κυρίου πίνειν καὶ ποτήριον δαιμονίων, οὐ δύνασθε τραπέζης Κυρίου μετέχειν καὶ τραπέζης δαιμονίων.

19. What do I imply? That what is offered to an idol is anything or that an idol is anything?  
 20. No, what they sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons and not to God. And I do not want you to become participants of the demons. 21. You cannot drink from the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot be partaking of the table of the Lord and of the table of demons.

Here Paul brings out more clearly the fact that partaking of the Lord's Supper is incompatible with partaking of the pagan cultic meals. And the reason is that behind the idols, which pagans offer the sacrificial food, are demons. Since the Corinthian believers are in danger of misunderstanding Paul's line of argument, he asked a set of questions in order to get their attention back on track. There is a textual problem with the clause *ἢ ὅτι εἰδωλον τι ἐστὶν*. The UBS includes it but Thiselton mentions that some other manuscripts omit it.<sup>36</sup> Its addition make the statement look like a tautology but otherwise it does not alter the sense and meaning of Paul's argument in any significant way. We will therefore retain it.

The *οὖν*, at the beginning of verse 19, is an inferential conjunction referring back to the illustration from Israel's sacrificial system in verse 18 as well as the explanation in verses 16 and 17 about the Lord's Supper. *Φημι* has more than the sense of "saying" and refers to an assertion. Hence, the phrase will have the following sense "what then do I imply by what I declare?" From his previous argument in verses 16-18, they

<sup>36</sup>Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 772.

would think that Paul is saying that εἰδωλοθυτον and εἰδωλον (“food sacrificed to idols and idols) are real in themselves. But that is not his point! His point is that there is “something” behind the idol and that “something” is not God but a demon. So he explains further in verse 20.

The verse 20 has a textual variation in various manuscripts. The phrase τα εθνη is added to the first θυουσιν in some manuscripts but omitted by others. If the phrase is retained, the passage will read “the sacrifice the Pagans or the Gentiles offer.”

Without that phrase, the passage will read “they sacrifice”. It seems we are no better off whether we retain it or leave it because its presence or absence will not really affect the sentence since the context shows that Paul is clearly referring to the Gentiles. Another textual issue is where the second θυουσιν belongs. Again, whether we add it or not will not change the overall sense of the passage. If we retain it, the passage will read “and they do not sacrifice it to God,” but without it, the passage will read “and not to God.”<sup>37</sup>

Here, Paul now tells them what lies behind the idol and all those idolatrous sacrifices. The alternative conjunction αλλα, which begins the sentence seeks to contrast verse 19 with 20. The argument then goes something like this; “Do I imply that idolatrous sacrifices or idols are anything. No!...” It then seems best to translate all as “No!” What is sacrificed to idols are actually to demons and not to the one true God. Here Paul alludes to the Song of Moses in Deut. 32: 15-18 in which Moses points out that when the Jews offered sacrifices to the golden calf, it was actually to demons and not to God. Bruce sees another parallel of the sacrifices to idols, with the Septuagint’s

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<sup>37</sup>See the full variations in the UBS footnote on the text.

version of Isa. 65: 3 were the pagan sacrifice to “non-existent demons.”<sup>38</sup> The word δαιμονες refer to “demon, evil spirit, of independent beings who occupy a position somewhere between the human and the divine.”<sup>39</sup> Paul’s way of associating demons with idols seems to be a basic Jewish understanding of the matter. This understanding is shown by the fact that they commonly paired “idols and demons” and “demons and idol worship.”<sup>40</sup> It has been shown that there is synonymity between idols and demons.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, the “Greek term *ειδωλον*, in addition to the standard meanings—‘image,’ ‘idol,’ ‘false god’—retains the classical meaning “phantom (of the dead)” and the demons that empower and inhabit the idol. Although poorly documented in Koine lexica, several passages point to the overlap of meaning.”<sup>42</sup> These demons, which hide behind idols are opposed to God and hostile to all that is righteous. Hence, to commune with them is to commune with the enemies of God. Such a behavior contravenes the covenant the believer has with God through Jesus Christ. Whether the Corinthian Christians know it or not, pagan sacrifices are to a demon and not to God. Such is the seriousness of the matter among the early Christians that the same idea is expressed in the Didache where the Christian is admonished to “keep strictly away from meat sacrificed to idols, for it involves the worship of dead gods.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>38</sup>Bruce, *I & II Corinthians*, 96.

<sup>39</sup>Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt and Wilbur F. Gingrich, eds. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature*, 4<sup>th</sup> rev, ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 169.

<sup>40</sup>See Zech 13:2; Rev 9:20 respectively. Also Comfort, “Idolatry,” [CD-Rom]

<sup>41</sup>Comfort, “Idolatry,” [CD-Rom].

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup>Michael W. Holmes, ed., *The Apostolic Fathers*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1989), 152.

Yeager asserts that there “is nothing either good or evil about the idol or the temple. They are only stone and timber.”<sup>44</sup> Such a view fails to see the force of Paul’s argument. For despite the fact that they are stone and timber, there is something more heinous behind them and that is where the evil is. In fact, it is for this reason that Paul tells them that he does not want them to have communion with demons.  $\theta\epsilon\lambda\omega$  is an aoristic present and with  $\text{ou}$  (“not”) before it, it indicates Paul’s passion that he does not want them to  $\kappa\omicron\iota\upsilon\omega\nu\omicron\upsilon\varsigma \tau\omega\nu \delta\alpha\iota\mu\omicron\nu\omicron\iota\omega\nu \gamma\iota\nu\epsilon\sigma\theta\alpha\iota$ -become communal participants with demons. Partaking of the Lord’s Supper is becoming a communal participant with Christ, so it is with eating food offered to idols; the participant gets involved with demons. Eating with both Christ and his enemies simultaneously is against the Christian concept of holiness, hence it is highly unacceptable. This Paul states more emphatically in verse 21.

In verse 21, Paul now states that they cannot have it both ways because the two (Christ and demons) are incompatible. Thiselton well describes the phrase  $\text{ou} \delta\upsilon\nu\alpha\sigma\theta\epsilon$ , when he says:

“The use of  $\text{ou} \delta\upsilon\nu\alpha\sigma\theta\epsilon$  conveys (i) a *logical cannot* (the two possibilities logically exclude each other); (ii) an *empirical cannot* (something will be destroyed if you try to do both); and (iii) an *institutional cannot* (Christians cannot, and still be *counted* as “Christians”).”<sup>45</sup> The word  $\delta\upsilon\nu\alpha\sigma\theta\epsilon$  is an gnomic present, showing that at the time of Paul’s writing the some of the believers in Corinth were still participating in this abominable act. The first  $\kappa\alpha\iota$  joins the phrase  $\text{ποτηριον κυριου}$  with the phrase

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<sup>44</sup>Randolph O. Yeager, *The Renaissance New Testament*, vol. 12 (Gretna: Pelican, 1983), 573.

<sup>45</sup>Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 776.

ποτηριον δαιμονιων. The two phrases are descriptive of the religious meals which Christians and pagans participate in respectively.

Both κυριου and δαιμονιων are genitives of possession to show the real owners of the cups and tables at the respective meals and thus the real divine personalities involved in the respective feasts. The phrase “table of the Lord” might have as its background the Lord’s Table in Mal 1: 7,12 where Yahweh referred to his altar as “My table.”<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, the expression “table of demon” is “in accordance with general pagan usage: one sits at the “table” of the god, entertains the god, partakes of him.”<sup>47</sup> Both ποτηριον and τραπεζης are the direct objects of πινειν and μετεχειν respectively and are similar to what Wenham calls “*adverbial accusative* or an *accusative of general reference* or an *accusative of respect*.”<sup>48</sup> Both πινειν and μετεχειν are in the infinitive and are exegetical to δυνασθε. Our passage therefore will read as follows; “You cannot with respect to the cup of the Lord and the cup of demon to drink, you cannot with respect to the table of the Lord and the table of demon to partake.” In other words, you cannot drink and partake of both religious feasts concurrently. In fact doing that will bring a very serious repercussion. In the following verse (22), Paul did not mention the specific repercussion but asked two thought-provoking questions to help them see that they are in danger of God’s judgment.

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<sup>46</sup>Cf. Robertson and Plummer, *I Corinthians*, 217.

<sup>47</sup>Conzelmann, *I Corinthians*, 174.

<sup>48</sup>J. W. Wenham, *The Elements of New Testament Greek* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 84.

3. Those who partake of both the Lord's Supper and pagan cultic meals are provoking God to Jealousy (10: 22).

**Verse 22:** ἡ παραζηλοῦμεν τὸν Κύριον; μὴ ἰσχυρότεροι αὐτοῦ ἔσμεν;

“Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? We are not stronger than He, are we?”

These are the final questions Paul asks in our passage and they join the preceding argument by the word ἡ which is translated “or.”<sup>49</sup> Since the question is a rhetorical one, it seems best to let the translation of ἡ reflect its rhetorical function in the question.<sup>50</sup> The word παραζηλοῦμεν comes from παραζηλωω which means “to provoke to jealousy.”<sup>51</sup> This is an allusion to the Song of Moses in Deut. 32: 21 of the Septuagint. In that song, Moses recounts how the Israelites provoked the Lord to jealousy by their idolatry. The Lord in that case was Yahweh but in our passage, it logically refers to Christ from verse 21.<sup>52</sup> Paul was drawing a parallel between Israel and the Corinthian Church. He had earlier on (in 10: 7 citing Exo. 32:6) given them the example of how Israel provoked God to jealous by their idolatry and had told them that God's judgment of Israel in the wilderness (because of Idolatry, sexual immorality, testing the Lord and grumbling) was both an example and a warning to them (I Cor. 10: 10). So this question is a kind of recalling that warning and seeking to find out from them whether they are going to continue to partake in idolatry. If God did not spare His covenantal people Israel who committed idolatry, what makes them think that He will spare them (the Corinthian believers). For to “sit at meat in an idol temple is a bush-league insult to God. Are the Corinthians going to continue to do this? This is a direct question. Paul is asking for information, not expressing his

<sup>49</sup> See Fee who sees it as an untranslated “or” *First Epistle*, 473.

<sup>50</sup>Cf. Thiselton who goes on to translate it as “what!” *First Epistle*, 778.

<sup>51</sup>Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 616.

<sup>52</sup>Cf. Robertson and Plummer, *First Corinthians*, 218; Also Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 778.

disgust.”<sup>53</sup> If they are going to continue doing that, “do they think they are stronger than the Lord?” The μη, which begins the second question, implies that Paul was expecting a negative answer.<sup>54</sup> Paul’s use of ισχυροτεροι is because of the fact that it is some believers (who considered themselves strong) who are guilty of going to eat in pagan temples. So he is asking them whether they are “stronger than the Lord,” and he was expecting an answer “no!” By adding εσμεν to ισχυροτεροι Paul made a general statement, which included himself and all those who think they are strong. Conzelmann sees ισχυροτεροι as not alluding to the strong alone but rather “to the Corinthian mentality as a whole.”<sup>55</sup> But this is unlikely considering the fact that not all the Corinthian believers go to these pagan temples but the so-called strong among them.<sup>56</sup> So Paul is telling them that even if they think they are strong, they are not stronger than the Lord and their continual involvement in idolatry would arouse God’s anger. In this passage of verse 22, we see that partaking of the Lord’s Supper and eating pagan cultic meals provokes God to jealousy. And that this will lead to God’s judgment, but the kind of judgment is not clearly specified. The judgment may include death, but God is the only One to determine the kind of judgment He deems fit.

From our examination of 1 Cor. 10: 14-22, we see that God’s covenant people are not supposed to get involved in fellowship with demons by eating at pagan altars. We can gather the following three main principles from this section:

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<sup>53</sup>Yeager, *The Renaissance New Testament*, vol 12, 574.

<sup>54</sup>See Porter, *Idioms of the Greek New Testament*, 277.

<sup>55</sup>Conzelmann, *I Corinthians*, 174.

<sup>56</sup>Cf. 8:1-13.

- One becomes a communal participant with the divine personality at whose table one partakes. Hence, those who partake of the Lord's Supper become communal participant with Christ. And those who partake of pagan cultic meals at pagan altars become communal participants with demons.
- Since Christ and demons are enemies and are incompatible with each other, those who partake of the Lord's Supper must not partake of pagan altars. For one cannot become a communal participant of both Christ and demons. Most importantly, God's covenant people must never do this. Such an act is a very serious offence.
- The believer or God's covenant child who partakes of both the Lord's Supper and pagan altars is provoking God to jealousy. And God will surely judge such a person.

The issue of the Lord's Supper was so important to Paul that he returned to it again when he started discussing issues relating to the Church gathered together in worship. Here factionalism manifests itself right in the Church when they gather to partake of the Lord's Supper. For when they gather, there is division and discrimination among them on the basis of social class distinctions.

### **Social injustice at the Lord's Supper: 1 Cor. 11: 17-34.**

The previous issue of idolatry, which touched on the Lord's Supper related to individual members of the church, going to eat in pagan temples. Now Paul shifts his attention to the second issue, which touches on the Lord's Supper. This second issue relates to the corporate body of the Church, when they gather together for worship.

11: 17-34 is a unit Paul dedicated entirely to his instruction on the Lord's Supper. We



can divide 1 Cor 11: 17-34 into four parts: part one, 11: 17-22; part two, 11:23-26; part three, 11: 27-32; part four 11: 33-34. The division is on the basis of the boundary markers we find at the beginning of verse 17 (τουτο δε); 23 (γαρ); 27 (Ωστε) and 33 (Ωστε). In part one, 11: 17-22, Paul points out that those who partake of the Lord's Supper must not discriminate against each other. He brought this out by mentioning the specific abuses, which occurred when the Corinthian Church met for worship and to partake of the Lord's Supper. In part two, 11:23-26, he goes on to show them that the Lord's Supper is a celebration of Christ's sacrificial giving of Himself to God and other. He showed this by mentioning the institution of the Lord's Supper. In part three, 11:27-32, he points out that partaking of the Lord's Supper whilst discriminating against fellow believers will lead to God's judgment. He did this by applying the institution of the Lord's Supper (in part two, 11:23-26) to the abuses (in part one). And he goes on in part four, 11:33-34, to give practical suggestions to curtail the abuses in part one.<sup>57</sup> We shall examine parts one and two in this chapter (chapter three) and examine parts three and four in the next chapter (chapter four).

1. Those who Partake of the Lord's Supper must not Discriminate against each other 1 Cor. 11: 17-22.

**Verse 17:** Τοῦτο δὲ παραγγέλλων οὐκ ἐπαινώ ὅτι οὐκ εἰς τὸ κρείσσον ἀλλὰ εἰς τὸ ἥσσον συνέρχεσθε.

**Verse 18:** πρῶτον μὲν γὰρ συνερχομένων ὑμῶν ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ ἀκούω σχίσματα ἐν ὑμῖν ὑπάρχειν, καὶ μέρος τι πιστεύω.

**Verse 19:** δεῖ γὰρ καὶ αἰρέσεις ἐν ὑμῖν εἶναι, ἵνα [καὶ] οἱ δόκιμοι φανεροὶ γένωνται ἐν ὑμῖν.

**Verse 20:** Συνερχομένων οὖν ὑμῶν ἐπὶ τὸ αὐτὸ οὐκ ἔστιν Κυριακὸν δεῖπνον φαγεῖν·

**Verse 21:** ἕκαστος γὰρ τὸ ἴδιον δεῖπνον προλαμβάνει ἐν τῷ φαγεῖν, καὶ ὃς μὲν πεινᾷ, ὃς δὲ μεθύει.

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<sup>57</sup>Cf. Mark P. Surburg, "Structural and Lexical features in 1 Corinthians 11:27-32," *Concordia Journal* 26, no. 3 (2001) : 200-217, 200.

**Verse 22:** μὴ γὰρ οἰκίας οὐκ ἔχετε εἰς τὸ ἐσθίειν καὶ πίνειν; ἢ τῆς ἐκκλησίας τοῦ Θεοῦ καταφρονεῖτε, καὶ καταισχύνετε τοὺς μὴ ἔχοντας; τί εἶπω ὑμῖν; ἐπαινέσω ὑμᾶς; ἐν τούτῳ οὐκ ἐπαινῶ.

17. Now in giving these instructions, I do not praise or commend you, because you come together not for the better, but rather for the worse. 18. For first of all when you come together as a Church, I hear of divisions among you, and to some extent I believe it. 19. For it is necessary [for] heretical sects also to be among you, so that the approved ones become evident among you. 20. So when you come together at the same place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. 21. For in the eating each one takes his own supper first, and one is hungry, and another is drunk. 22. What! Do you not have houses to be eating and to be drinking in? Or do you despise the Church of God and humiliate the poor? What shall I say to you? Shall I praise or, commend you in this? Certainly not!

In this passage, Paul dealt with the problems of discrimination which was among the believers and points out that those who partake of the Lord's Supper must not discriminate against each other. So he began by withholding praise from them.

Instead of ἐπαινω δε υμας (I praise you) of 11:2, here it is οὐκ ἐπαινω (I do not praise you). The οτι which follows ἐπαινω is causal, introducing the subordinate clause which explains why Paul did not praise them. The end result of their meeting together is οὐκ εἰς τὸ κρεῖσσον ἀλλὰ εἰς τὸ ἥσσον, "not for better but for the worse." From the tone of this section it is clear that it is not a response to a question they have asked, but a report which Paul received from an unnamed source (11:18). The nature of the report is that there are divisions among the believers when they gather, for worship. And that this division relates directly to the Lord's Supper. Paul did not just point out the problem but also gave remedial measures they should follow.

Συνερχεσθε is a progressive present showing that they have been meeting regularly from the past to the time of Paul's writing.<sup>58</sup> Συνερχομαι means "coming together" or

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<sup>58</sup>Cf Randolph O. Yeager, *The Renaissance New Testament*, vol. 13, (Gretna: Pelican, 1983), 20.

“to assemble or gather.”<sup>59</sup> But the result of this gathering has been for the worse because it produces divisions not unity, among the believers. Συνερχομενων υμων is a genitive absolute and goes together with εν εκκλησιᾳ. Hence “when you gather together as a Church”. Εν εκκλησιᾳ refer to them as an assembly or a group, which meets with a purpose. The phrase is used here to refer to them as a Church. Paul’s use of the genitive absolute συνερχομενων υμων (when you gather together) and σχισματα (divisions) seems to be an irony. Their gathering together as Church, connotes or presupposes a united group. But on the contrary, it is at their gathering that their divisions also become apparent. Σχισματα has the root meaning “to split” or “to divide.”<sup>60</sup> It can also mean to “separate” tear apart, tear off.”<sup>61</sup> Paul uses it in 1:10, as he pleaded with them to be united and not to have σχισματα (divisions) among them. In the situation of 1:10, the division had to do with different loyalties to different teachers. But the division here (11:18) is of a different nature, and relates directly to their gatherings and not to loyalties to teachers.<sup>62</sup> Paul might not have believed initially but after being told repeatedly, he finally came to believe it to a certain extent (Ακουω is an iterative present so “I have repeatedly heard.”). Due to the divisions in their midst when they come together it is not the Lord’s Supper they eat. What they are eating is more of a private dinner for “as you eat, each of you goes ahead without waiting for anybody else” (verse 21).

By calling it the Lord’s Supper, Paul was indicating to them that the supper is His Supper. In that case then, Jesus is the host at the Lord’s Supper and everybody else is

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<sup>59</sup>Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 788.

<sup>60</sup>Moulton, *The Analytical Greek Lexicon*, 394.

<sup>61</sup>Bauer, Arndt Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 797.

<sup>62</sup>Cf. Fee, *First Epistle*, 537. Also Bruce, *I & II Corinthians*, 109.

a guest. This means that everyone who comes as a member of Christ's body and as Christ's guest, must come on equal footing and be treated equally. There is no room for social discrimination, for whatever reason, because they are all one. Since Christ is referred to as Lord, it means that all who come to His Table come as his slaves or subjects, for He is the Master. Class distinction among the communicants should never have arisen because they all come as equals before their Master. But unfortunately in the Corinthian Church, class distinction and divisions was what characterized the meal. Theissen has shown that the class distinction and divisions were caused by the social elite who sat and ate separately from the poor and also ate food of high quantity and quality.<sup>63</sup> Such characteristics disqualified their supper from being the Lord's Supper. The characteristic class distinction and division is shown by the fact that the rich members (or group) went ahead to eat their food without waiting for the poor members (or group). Or rather the rich ate whilst the poor looked on. This behavior of the rich resulted in them becoming filled and drunk while the poor went hungry. Winter has shown that the behavior of the rich was consistent with "socially accepted convention of 'private' dinners in secular Corinth."<sup>64</sup> But the Lord's Supper is not a private dinner! But since they are following the secular convention of private dinner, then their meal is a private supper, not the Lord's Supper. This contrast between the Lord's Supper and their private dinner is shown by Paul's use of κυριακον δειπνον (in verse 20) and το ιδιον δειπνον (in verse 21). This brings out the whole question of ownership of the dinner.<sup>65</sup> κυριακον here means

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<sup>63</sup>Theissen, *Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, 121-162.

<sup>64</sup>Winter, *After Paul left Corinth*, 142.

<sup>65</sup>Theissen. *Social Setting*, 148.

“belonging to the Lord, the Lord’s.”<sup>66</sup> δειπνον means “dinner, supper, the main meal toward the evening.”<sup>67</sup> Hence κυριακον δειπνον will mean the Lord’s Supper or the supper belonging to the Lord ιδιον has the root meaning of “belonging to an individual, ... in contrast to what is public property or belongs to another: private, one’s own, peculiar to oneself.”<sup>68</sup> So το ιδιον δειπνον will mean one’s own supper, supper belonging to an individual or a private supper. Here, the phrase then will mean the supper belonging to the individual in whose house the church is meeting at that particular hour. Since the meetings were held in the homes of the rich, then the reference is to the rich host and his favored rich guests.<sup>69</sup> Campbell argues that the Corinthian believers practiced discrimination in favor of the social elite, thus making the supper a private one and not Lord’s.<sup>70</sup> It is such a supper (with all its accompanying discriminations), which is contrasted with the Supper of the Lord. That Christ is the Lord of the Supper goes beyond just ownership and includes one in honor of him.<sup>71</sup> But such was not the supper they ate, theirs was for the rich members in the church (the “haves” group). Note that their behavior was said to shame the poor or the “have-nots” group (verse 22). This behavior did not happen in the absence of the Church but rather when the entire church met together in the same place. We need to mention that when they bring their food together and donate it to the Church, it ceases to be private property and become common property or rather

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<sup>66</sup>Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 458.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid. , 173.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid. , 369.

<sup>69</sup>Cf. Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 862.

<sup>70</sup>Alastair Campbell, “Does Paul Acquiesce in Division at the Lord’s Supper?” *Novum Testamentum* 33, no. 1 (2001) : 61-70.

<sup>71</sup>Cf Fee, *First Epistle*, 540.

the Lord's property.<sup>72</sup> The meeting together in the same place was supposed to be an occasion for the common good of all as befits God's covenant people.<sup>73</sup> But since they did not meet for the common good of all, hence "it is not the Lord's Supper you eat" (οὐκ ἐστὶν κυριακὸν δεῖπνον θάγειν). The Lord's Supper is equivalent to the Lord's Table in 10:21. The reason their gathering and eating did not amount to the Supper of the Lord's is that each one in the course of the eating, devours his own supper. Lampe suggests that there is the possibility that the rich arrived earlier and ate the best of the food.<sup>74</sup> However, the use of προλαμβάνει makes this unlikely. Winter argues that προλαμβάνει should be taken as "devour" or "consume" because the prefix προ- has a non-temporal sense and is for the purpose of intensification.<sup>75</sup> Προλαμβάνει ordinarily mean "take before."<sup>76</sup> In some cases, "the temporal force of προ- is still felt but in other uses it is "felt very little."<sup>77</sup> However, in this case Winter's assertion that προ- has a non-temporal sense sounds convincing given that they were doing this right in the presence of the poor and in the cause of the supper. Such an attitude is pure greed and does injustice to the have-nots.<sup>78</sup> It was a violation of the spirit of κοινωνία especially when we consider the fact that it was happening in a famine period.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>Luise Schottroff, "Holiness and Justice: Exegetical Comments on I Corinthians 11: 17-34," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 79 (2000) : 51-60. 54.

<sup>73</sup>Cf. 10: 24; 12: 7.

<sup>74</sup>Peter Lampe, "The Eucharist," *Interpretation* 48 (2001) : 36-49.

<sup>75</sup>Winter, *After Paul left Corinth*, 148.

<sup>76</sup>Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 708.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid. , 708.

<sup>78</sup>Cf. Winter, *After Paul left Corinth*, 148.

<sup>79</sup>See Winter who points out that there was famine in Corinth around this period. Ibid. 6.

We see from the accounts of the Church in Acts that the rich sold their things and they (together with the poor) shared everything as each had need (Acts 2: 44,45.). We also note that in the Acts accounts, all the believers were said to be of one heart and mind and that no one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had” (4:32). Luke goes on to say that “there was no needy persons among them” (4:34). We conclude, from this Acts account, that the essence of κοινωνία, sharing, is to ensure that everyone had something and none went empty. This sharing included food and table-fellowship (Acts 2:46). The sense of community here included sharing and ensuring that no persons were needy among them. But in the Corinthian situation, even though the rich remained part of the community, yet they were not willing to share (their food and most likely their wealth). When they brought their food and donate it to the Church, it became common property. But then they go on to treat it as private property. Such a behavior is similar to that of Sapphira and Ananias.<sup>80</sup> Their action left the community in great disparity. Some had more than enough whilst others had virtually nothing; “one remains hungry, another gets drunk” (1Cor 11:21).

To ἰδίου δειπνον may mean that each brought his own food and ate it or the food was provided for by the rich host who ate with his rich friends (either in the presence of the poor or before the poor arrived), leaving the poor with little or nothing to eat. Theissen suggests that there was “variable beginnings for the meal”; “different amounts of food” and that “meals of different qualities” were served.<sup>81</sup> Paul’s disgust at such uncaring attitude of the rich believers become clear from the questions he

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<sup>80</sup>Schottroff, “Holiness and Justice,” 54.

<sup>81</sup>Theissen, *The Social Setting of Pauline Christianity*, 151-155.

asked in verse 22.<sup>82</sup> The μη at the beginning of the first question expected a negative answer – “No”. Thiselton’s translation, ‘surely it cannot be...can it?’<sup>83</sup> brings out the force of μη. Also εις together “with the articular infinitive conveys the sense of with a view to, for the purpose of...”<sup>84</sup> This then means that they can use their own houses for the purpose of private dinners instead of doing it in the presence of the gathered church of God.

The genitive of possession του θεου relates to εκκλησια showing that the church they are despising belongs to God. Since it belongs to God, to despise the church is to despise God, the Owner. In Acts 9, Paul’s (or Saul) persecution of the church was interpreted as a persecution of Christ himself (9:1-5). Paul might be having similar ideas as he wrote to them. καταφρονειτε has the root meaning to “put to shame,” but it is used here to mean “humiliate.”<sup>85</sup> It can also mean to “look down on, despise, scorn, treat with contempt.”<sup>86</sup> The action of the rich amounts to treating the μη εχοντας (the have-nots) with contempt and thus humiliating the have-nots or the poor. In the wisdom literature, oppressing the poor is equivalent to showing “contempt to their Maker” – God (Prov.14: 31). If we are to be informed from there, then showing contempt to the Church of God and humiliating the poor is equivalent to showing contempt to God himself. This might explain why they were judged severely, with weakness, sickness and death (11:29,30). The behavior of the rich was contrary to Christ’s sacrificial giving of Himself, hence Paul’s question τι ειπω υμιν;

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<sup>82</sup>Cf Fee, *First Epistle*, 543.

<sup>83</sup>Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 864.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid. , 864.

<sup>85</sup>Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 410.

<sup>86</sup>Ibid. , 420.



επαινεσω υμας; (what shall I say to you? Shall I praise you?). "Their behavior indicates that the church counts for nothing in their eyes."<sup>87</sup> So they deserve no praise or commendation from Paul.

In order to show them the seriousness of their action, Paul reminds them that the Lord's Supper is a celebration of Christ's Sacrificial giving of Himself; that the tradition does not originate with Paul or any other human but with the Lord himself; and that this tradition began on the night on which Jesus was handed over, to be crucified.

2. The Lord's Supper is a celebration of Christ's Sacrificial giving of Himself (1 Cor. 11: 23-26).

**Verse 23:** Ἐγὼ γὰρ παρέλαβον ἀπὸ τοῦ Κυρίου, ὃ καὶ παρέδωκα ὑμῖν, ὅτι ὁ Κύριος Ἰησοῦς ἐν τῇ νυκτὶ ἣ παρεδίδοτο ἔλαβεν ἄρτον

**Verse 24:** καὶ εὐχαριστήσας ἔκλασεν καὶ εἶπεν, Τοῦτό μού ἐστιν τὸ σῶμα τὸ ὑπὲρ ὑμῶν· τοῦτο ποιεῖτε εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν.

**Verse 25:** ὡσαύτως καὶ τὸ ποτήριον μετὰ τὸ δειπνήσαι λέγων, Τοῦτο τὸ ποτήριον ἡ καινὴ διαθήκη ἐστὶν ἐν τῷ ἐμῷ αἵματι· τοῦτο ποιεῖτε, ὡσάκις ἐὰν πίνητε, εἰς τὴν ἐμὴν ἀνάμνησιν.

**Verse 26:** ὡσάκις γὰρ ἐὰν ἐσθίητε τὸν ἄρτον τοῦτον καὶ τὸ ποτήριον πίνητε, τὸν θάνατον τοῦ Κυρίου καταγγέλλετε ἄχρις οὗ ἔλθῃ.

23. For I received from the Lord what I also handed down to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread, 24. and having given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body, which is for you. Be doing this in remembrance of Me."

25. And in the same manner He took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Be doing this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." 26. For as often as you shall be eating this bread and drinking this cup, you are proclaiming the death of the Lord, until He comes.

When it comes to the Lord's Supper, it is the Supper where the Lord is the host and God's people come as a family to His table to eat His food. Since it is the Lord's

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<sup>87</sup>Fee, *First Epistle*, 544.

Table, Paul now reminds them that the origin of what they are celebrating as a covenant goes back to the Lord Himself. This tradition, which he taught them to practice, he also received from the Lord. Εγώ γάρ παρελαβόν απο του κυριου (for I received from the Lord) may mean a revelation he received directly from Jesus or a tradition he received from others who were Christians before him. It may also be that after Paul had been told about it by those who became Christians before him, the Lord also gave him a revelation about that night together with its accompanying explanations. Παρελαβόν (received) and παρεδωκα (delivered) are technical terms in ancient times. Among the Greeks, the terms were “used for the cultivation of the school tradition.”<sup>88</sup> But among the Jews, the terms were used for the transmission of oral tradition from one generation to the other.<sup>89</sup> We see a similar example among the Christians, where the Thessalonians received the gospel message from Paul, Silas and Timothy and they in turn passed it on by word of mouth to people throughout Macedonia and Achaia.<sup>90</sup> Whichever way one looks at it, it is a tradition that still goes back to the Lord himself. This tradition which Paul received and passed on to them, started on the night Christ was handed over to be crucified. Παρεδιδετο has the root meaning of to “hand over, turn over, give up a person.”<sup>91</sup> There is uncertainty as to whether Paul was here referring to Judas’ betrayal or not.<sup>92</sup> Παρεδιδετο may be referring to more than just Judas, betrayal. It may include the Father’s giving up of

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<sup>88</sup>Conzelmann, *1 Corinthians*, 195.

<sup>89</sup>Fee, *First Epistle*, 548.

<sup>90</sup>1 Thess. 1:5,6-8. Cf. Kistemaker, *1 Corinthians*, 393.

<sup>91</sup>Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 614.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid. , 614.

the son (to die) as well as the son's willing surrender of his life.<sup>93</sup> Paul may be implying all of these when he used *παρεδιδετο*. That night, was a crisis moment for Jesus and his disciples, for it was the time he was physically parting from them. But in order to remain bonded to them, he sealed their relationship with a covenant. Thus he took bread...and cup (11:23,25). The phrase *ελαβεν αρτον* (took bread) begins the actual institution. To Paul, the celebration of the Lord's Supper as a remembrance of the night that Jesus was handed over demands radical change of life and attitude. Thiselton asserts that: "Just as the Lord's supper looks back to the last supper when Jesus was about to be *handed over, voluntarily to renounce self-direction and autonomy to place his self-hood and destiny in the hands of God and human persons without any further "say" in what happens*, so, Paul argues, by proclaiming it in word, sacrament, attitude, and life."<sup>94</sup> The institution itself has the following order:

- (i) Took the bread
- (ii) Gave thanks
- (iii) Broke it
- (iv) Spoke words of interpretation over the bread
- (v) Took the cup
- (vi) Spoke words of interpretation over the cup.<sup>95</sup>

This description of the Last Supper can be found in Matthew, Mark and Luke in different forms. Matt 26:26-28, Mk 14:22-24, Lk 22:19-20. The debate as to which of them is original shows no sign of abating. But that debate is beyond the scope of this

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<sup>93</sup>Robertson and Plummer, *I Corinthians*, 243.

<sup>94</sup>Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 870.

<sup>95</sup>Cf. *Ibid.*, 875-876.

research. Jesus taking up the bread was for the purpose of giving thanks for it and breaking it. His breaking it was for the purpose of distributing it to his disciples after his interpretation. In this, we see both action and speech. Jesus acted, “taking” and “breaking”, and spoke, “giving thanks” and “saying”. This has made Wenham to call the Last Supper “a parable in action.”<sup>96</sup> In a rejoinder to Wenham’s article, Tinker posits that the Last Supper was more than “a parable in action.”<sup>97</sup>

Jesus handling of the bread followed the pattern of Jewish meals in which the head of the household gave “the traditional blessing over the bread” before breaking it, and giving it to those at the table with him.”<sup>98</sup> At the Last Supper, Jesus as the Master and Teacher, “undoubtedly played that role.”<sup>99</sup> This means that in the celebration of the Lord’s Supper, Jesus is the head of the household and the household is the Church gathered at the table. Jesus’ giving of thanks over the bread might have followed the normal Jewish thanksgiving for bread. But it is possible that “Jesus used a distinctive form of his own.”<sup>100</sup> All the three Gospels record that Jesus gave thanks. This giving of thanks was directed to God for the food to be eaten.

The phrase “breaking of bread” refers to table fellowships and can be found in the early Church (Acts 2:42,46; 20::7,11). But Paul’s use of it here refers to Jesus’ physical breaking of the bread for the purpose of distributing it to his disciples. The

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<sup>96</sup>D. Wenham, “How Jesus understood the Last Supper: A Parable in Action,” *Themelios* 20, no. 2 (1995) : 11-16.

<sup>97</sup>Melvin Tinker, “Last Supper/Lord’s Supper: More than a Parable in Action?” *Themelios* 26, no. 2 (2001) : 18-28.

<sup>98</sup>Fee, *First Epistle*, 550.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid. , 550; Cf. Jn 13:13,14.

<sup>100</sup>Bruce, *I & II Corinthians*, 111.

phrase “breaking of bread” has various connotations depending on the context in which it is used. Among the Jews it was a rite which marked “the beginning of the meal.”<sup>101</sup> It was also a Jewish expression for food.<sup>102</sup> Conzelmann observes that “among non-Jews bread is distributed by breaking.”<sup>103</sup> The Lukan usage associates the phrase to table fellowship. He uses it in the context of Jesus’ last supper (Lk 22:19, Cf, Mt 26:26, Mk 14:27), and in the context of the early Church’s table fellowship (Acts 2:42,46; 20:7,11). Thiselton observes that “*breaking bread* has the communal sense of sharing in solidarity of objective fellowship (κοινωνια, that in which participants or shareholders share, not primarily the subjective feeling associated with this), and this aspect finds expression in 1 Cor 10:16.....and probably also in Acts 2:42,46.”<sup>104</sup> Also we find in the Didache that the phrase expressly refers to the Lord’s Supper.<sup>105</sup> In our passage under discussion, the phrase refers directly to Jesus’ breaking of bread for distribution to his disciples. But from the Pauline usage of it in 10:16 and the context in which he has used it here, it may imply the sense of community as well.

Jesus’ reference to the bread as “this is my body” has generated a lot of heated argument and in fact has even divided the Church. Churches are divided along the lines of whether the bread became Christ’s real body or was a symbol of it.<sup>106</sup> Jesus’

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<sup>101</sup>Conzelmann. *1 Corinthians*, 197.

<sup>102</sup>Jer. 16:7; Cf. *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>103</sup>*Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>104</sup>Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 875.

<sup>105</sup>Didache 9:34. Also see the whole of Didache 9-10 in Lightfoot and Harmer, *The Apostolic Fathers*, 154.

<sup>106</sup>For full discussion of these views see Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1107-1128.

words of interpretation over the bread is a re-interpretation of the Passover *haggadah*.<sup>107</sup> The precise meaning of the phrase, as used by Jesus, is not easy to determine. Fee sees the phrase as referring to Jesus ‘actual body, which was about to be given over in death.’<sup>108</sup> He sees this as being analogous “with the sacrificial victim, whose “body” (carcass) was placed on the altar after the blood had been poured out.”<sup>109</sup> Thiselton follows Fee in this and says; “it is the event of Calvary, of the atoning death of Jesus as an event, within the public domain, that is now appropriated in, ‘**this is my body for you**’.”<sup>110</sup> For Onwu, “the bread is the body of Christ in representative form in the sense of sacramental identity.”<sup>111</sup> Hering thinks that the exact relationship between the bread and the body cannot be determined.<sup>112</sup> He then adds that what interests Paul “primarily in the doctrine of the body is its presence in the church, which is founded on the communion with Christ actualized in the Eucharist. That is why we find no explanation of the manner in which the body is present in the bread. All that can be said is that genuine communion with the dead and risen Christ is made possible by the bread.”<sup>113</sup> Jesus’ words in its original setting of the Last Supper, refers to his whole person which he was about to surrender to die.<sup>114</sup> This is shown by the phrase το υπερ υμων (which is for you). The phrase

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<sup>107</sup>See our earlier discussion on this on page 32.

<sup>108</sup>Fee, *First Epistle*, 550.

<sup>109</sup>Ibid. , 551.

<sup>110</sup>Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 877.

<sup>111</sup>Onwu, “The Eucharist as Covenant in the African Context,” *Africa Theological Journal* 16, no. 21 (1987) : 145-158, 149.

<sup>112</sup>Jean Hering, *The First Epistle of Saint Paul to the Corinthians*, trans. A.W Heat Cote and P.J. Allcock (London: Epworth Press, 1962) ,116.

<sup>113</sup>Ibid. 116.

<sup>114</sup>With Fee and Thiselton.

‘which is for you’ (similar to the Lukan version but absent in both Mathew and Mark), may be an allusion to the suffering servant in Isa. 53.<sup>115</sup> In the Isaiah passage the suffering servant died for the sake of others (Isa. 53:9-12). Hence, the “work of the suffering servant”... oscillates between identification and substitution, as does  $\sigma\omega\mu\alpha$ .<sup>116</sup> Fee explains that “for Jesus himself this is almost certainly a prophetic symbol in action, by which he anticipated his death and interpreted it in light of Isa. 53 as in behalf of others.”<sup>117</sup> That Paul understood Jesus’ words in this way is manifestly shown in his explanation of Christ’s death in substitutionary terms.<sup>118</sup>

But Jesus’ words do not just show the exemplary, sacrificial and substitutionary nature of his death, it also included a command, which must be obeyed. The disciples, and subsequently the Church, were to “do this in remembrance of me.” Jeremias explains that Jesus was asking God to remember him.<sup>119</sup> But this sounds unconvincing, for as Conzelmann observes, “this interpretation is in contradiction to the plain wording. The meaning is: “in remembrance of me.”<sup>120</sup> The “remembrance” may have at its background the Passover feast in which Jesus remembered God’s mighty acts of deliverance from Egyptian oppression. But this remembrance, is more than a mere mental activity, it goes together with action.<sup>121</sup> In the Passover feast we

<sup>115</sup>Cf. Fee, *First Epistle*, 551.

<sup>116</sup>Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 877.

<sup>117</sup>Fee, *First Epistle*, 551.

<sup>118</sup>See Rom 5:6,8; 1 Cor.15:3; Cf. Gal 3:13.

<sup>119</sup>Jeremias, *Eucharistic Words*, 254 – 255.

<sup>120</sup>Conzelmann, *I Corinthians*, 199.

<sup>121</sup>Cf. Fee, *First Epistle*, 553.

note that there was an activity (the whole process of the supper) as well as a speech, relating what God did in the past.<sup>122</sup> Clancy has shown that the OT roots of “remembrance” include both speech and action.<sup>123</sup> This might explain why Paul says (in 11:27) that “For whenever you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.” The eating and drinking refer to the activity and the accompanying words of institution refer to the speech part. But the remembrance goes beyond just an activity and a speech. For as Thiselton observes:

**Remembrance** of Christ and of Christ’s death (i) retains the biblical aspect of a self-involving remembering in gratitude, worship, trust, acknowledgment, and obedience (see biblical examples above). (ii) It also carries with it the experience of being “there” in identification with the crucified Christ who is also “here” in his raised presence. However, still further, it embraces (iii) a self-transforming retrieval of the founding event of the personal identity of the believer (as a believer) and the corporate identity of the church (as the Christian church of God) as well as (iv) a looking forward to the new “possibility” for transformed identity opened up by the eschatological consummation (v.25). All of this is gathered together in Paul’s point that such remembrance constitutes a self-involving proclamation of Christ’s death through a life and a lifestyle which derives from understanding our identity as Christians in terms of sharing the identity of Christ who is for the “other”<sup>124</sup>

After taking, breaking and giving of the bread, Jesus took the cup. But there was an intervening period between the bread and the cup. This is indicated by the phrase *μετα το δειπνησαι* (after the cup). Between the bread and the wine they ate supper.<sup>125</sup> There is no giving of thanks associated with the cup. Jesus gave them the cup and

<sup>122</sup>See Exo. 12 where the LORD gave the Israelites the detailed process of the celebration which included the activity (12:14-20) and the speech (12:26,27).

<sup>123</sup>Robert A.D. Clancy, “The Old Testament Roots of Remembrance in the Lord’s Supper,” *Concordia Journal* 19 (1993) : 35 – 50.

<sup>124</sup>Thiselton. *First Epistle*, 880.

<sup>125</sup>In our discussion of the Passover, we had mentioned that during the main meal they ate bread, then the supper before the third cup.



interpreted it as His blood. The words of interpretation over the cup take different forms in the four sources available to us:

Matt: This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sin.

Mk: This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.

Luk: The cup which is poured out for you, is the new covenant in my blood.

I Cor: This cup is the new covenant in my blood.

It is beyond the scope of this research to go into the details comparing them, but let it suffice for us to point out one key issue. Basic to all our sources is the mention of blood and covenant. The blood represents a sacrificial offering to God and for atonement, and it is also for ratification of a covenant. We also note that in the Passover night (in Exo 12), the blood of the Lamb became the means by which the Israelites escaped the plague on the first borns (Exo 12:13). With this Jewish background, it is likely that Jesus was referring to his impending sacrificial death. And that, this sacrificial death is for the atonement of the sins of the people. Also, it is for the purpose of creating a new covenant people of God. “New covenant”, as opposed to the previous covenant between God and Israel.<sup>126</sup> Paul spoke of the vicarious nature of Christ’s blood in both Acts 20:38 and Rom 5:9.<sup>127</sup> Elsewhere in Heb 9, we see that blood was the basis of forgiveness (9:22). The term *διαθηκη* in the LXX is a translation of the Hebrew word *beriyth*. The word has the meaning

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<sup>126</sup>We need to mention that this new covenant is the further outworking of the Abrahamic covenant.

<sup>127</sup>Cf. Col 1:20.

“covenant” or “last will or testament.”<sup>128</sup> Διαθηκη (covenant) and καινη (new) are combined in the LXX in the book of Jer. 38:31 (the equivalent of the M.T. Jer. 31:31). Paul might be having this concept of a new covenant from the LXX in mind as he wrote to the Corinthian believers. The use of διαθηκη in the Pauline corpus include the following:

- (i) The faithfulness of God in keeping his promises to Israel. Rom 9:4,11:27.
- (ii) The new covenant of the Spirit, not of the letter, II Cor 3:6. But the reading of the old covenant made the minds of the Israelites dull. II Cor. 3:14.
- (iii) The faithfulness of God in keeping his promise to Abraham by providing salvation by grace through Jesus Christ. Gal 3:15.<sup>129</sup>

In the book of Hebrews, covenant “denotes the irrevocable nature of the divine promise both in continuity with the OT and contrast to it as “better” or fully efficacious (Heb 8:7-13; Jer 31:31-34).”<sup>130</sup> We therefore gather from all this information that the blood of Jesus was the means by which God created a new covenant community for Himself. This covenant community is also called the Church of God (I Cor 11:20).<sup>131</sup> All the believers of Corinth are part of this covenant community. As a covenant community, they were to live a life of sacrifice and concern for one another.

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<sup>128</sup>Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 183.

<sup>129</sup>Cf. Gal 4:24. Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 885.

<sup>130</sup>Ibid. , 885.

<sup>131</sup>Cf. Acts 20:28.

In our passage, “the cup stands by metonymy for what it contains” that is the wine.<sup>132</sup> Hence, the wine is what Jesus is referring to as “new covenant in my blood”. The mention of blood has behind it the idea of sacrifice.<sup>133</sup> In Jewish thought, blood stands for the life of its bearer. We read from Lev 17:11 that “for the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for ones life.” This statement was made by Yahweh, when He was commanding the Jews not to eat blood. We also note from the passage that blood was for atonement. In Exo 24: 1-8 when Israel ratified the covenant between them and Yahweh, blood was involved. They “sacrificed young bulls as fellowship offering to the LORD.” (Exo. 24:5). Moses took part of the blood of the bulls and sprinkled it on the altar (verse 6). And after reading the “Book of the covenant to the people,” he sprinkled the remaining half of the blood on them saying “This is the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all those words” (Verses 7, 8). From this we gather that the blood was the means by which the covenant was ratified.

Jesus’ shedding of His blood set an example of love and care for others, for all the new covenant people of God. Such conduct is to be part of the obedience to the command “do this whenever you drink it in remembrance of me.” It goes beyond just recalling the death and life of Jesus. It includes living as His covenant people and following his example of self-sacrifice for the sake of others.<sup>134</sup> Thiselton asserts that

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<sup>132</sup>Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich. *Greek-English Lexicon*, 695.

<sup>133</sup>Cf. Conzelmann, *I Corinthians*, 199.

<sup>134</sup>Lampe, “The Eucharist” *Interpretation*. 46. Laurance had argued that as believers partake of the Eucharist, they are to imitate Christ’s life in every way. John D. Laurance, “The Eucharist as the Imitation of Christ,” *Theological Studies* 47 (1986) : 286-296.

the phrase underlies “four self-involving aspects”, namely: (1) Trust and grateful acknowledgement; (2) Identification with Christ and his death as those who were “there”; (3) Allowing a reshaping of narrative identity in accordance with the founding event which defines the Christian story; and (4) Looking ahead to projected eschatological worlds which give meaning to present identify and to present endeavor.<sup>135</sup>

Jesus’ celebration of the Last Supper with the command to do it in remembrance of him became the basis of celebrating the Lord’s Supper. The Lord’s Supper then is “meant to be a living *memorial or remembrance* of God’s redemption of the world through the *sacrificial* life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.”<sup>136</sup> This celebration is to be done often. The opening γὰρ at the beginning of verse 26 refers back to verses 23-25 and links it with the preceding sentence in 26. So that on the basis of 23b – 25, their eating and drinking is a proclamation of Jesus death “until he comes” (verse 26). The meaning of οσᾶκις (as often) may be determined not just by the study of the term itself but rather from the whole context of I Corinthians. The question is how often is οσᾶκις? How often did the Corinthian Church celebrate the Lord’s Supper? Οσᾶκις is a temporal conjunction and have the root meaning, in this passage, “of the number of times; how much (many), as much (many) as.”<sup>137</sup> We can get an idea from 1 Cor. 16: 2, where Paul talking about the collection for God’s people mentions the first day of every week.” Fee has argued that this day was the day the believers “gathered for their specifically Christian celebration of worship,

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<sup>135</sup>Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 885-886.

<sup>136</sup> J. Frederick Hopley, “As Often as you Eat this Bread and Drink the Cup,” *Interpretation* 48 (2001) : 61-73, 70.

<sup>137</sup>Bauer, Arduy and Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 586.

which included the Lord's Table."<sup>138</sup> This means *οσακις* will be at least on weekly basis. So at least once a week they will be proclaiming the Lord's death. The term *καταγγελλειν* has the root meaning "to proclaim."<sup>139</sup> It also means "to announce, to laud, celebrate."<sup>140</sup> In the New Testament, its usage relates to the gospel, the word of God or Christ.<sup>141</sup> So their celebration of the Lords Supper is a proclamation of the work of Christ on the cross – His death. This proclamation must be both to themselves and to on-lookers. The ceremony becomes "an acted affirmation of the communicants interest in the Saviours' blood."<sup>142</sup> *Καταγγελλετε* is a present continuous tense, hence "you are proclaiming."<sup>143</sup> It goes with *οσακις* to show that the proclamation (continuously) always accompany the partaking of the Lord's Supper. Thiselton alludes to the fact that the proclamation is also to the participants when he says that the partaking "also witnesses to the participants self-involving appropriation of the cross both for redemption and lifestyle as those who share Christ death in order to share Christ's life"<sup>144</sup> The proclamation is about Christ's death to stress the fact that Jesus "gave himself freely for the sake of others" not for His own sake.<sup>145</sup> By this death he has created a new covenant community for God devoid of social class distinctions. The failure of the Corinthian believers to grasp this fact, as they eat and drink, might be what constituted unworthy eating. As

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<sup>138</sup>Fee, *First Epistle*, 814; Cf. Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 1321.

<sup>139</sup>Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon*. 409.

<sup>140</sup>Moulton, *The Analytical Greek Lexicon*, 214.

<sup>141</sup>I Cor 9:14; Acts 13:5; 4:2; Philip 1:17,18. Cf. Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 887.

<sup>142</sup>Bruce, *I & II Corinthians*, 113. Cf. Robertson and Plummer, *I Corinthians*, 249.

<sup>143</sup>Cf. Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 886.

<sup>144</sup>Ibid. , 887.

<sup>145</sup>Fee, *First Epistle*, 557.

they ate and drank, they did not just look back in proclaiming Christ's death but also looked forward to Christ's coming, hence *αχρις ου ελθη* (until he comes). The Lord's Supper looks back to Calvary's victory and forward to the consummation of that victory in the eschaton. As the believers look back and forward, they are to live in the present by relating justly with each other without any form of discrimination. It was at this point that Corinthian believers got it wrong. Their conduct at the Lord's Supper did injustice to the economically weak (the poor) in their midst. Instead of caring for the poor, as fellow members of Christ's body, they rather despised and humiliated them. Their conduct became unworthy of those who are bought with Christ's blood and are members of Christ's body. This abuse of the Lord's Table made them guilty of sinning against Christ's body and blood. But how can one sin against the blood, which bought him, and the body of which he is a member, and go free? We shall explore this issue further in our next chapter. But in the meantime, let us see what principles we can gather from the whole of 11:17-26.

From our examination of 11:17-26, we gather that:

- Those who partake of the Lord's Supper must not discriminate against each other in any way for to do so is to despise the Church of God, and humiliate those discriminated against.
- The Lord's Supper is a celebration of Christ's sacrificial giving of Himself to God and others. That through this sacrificial giving of Himself, the Church was born and the members of the Church are united to Christ and to one another.
- The Lord's Supper recalls the past, touches on the present and looks forward with hope to the future. In the Lord's Supper the believer recalls

all that Christ has accomplished for him or her at Calvary and looks forward with hope to the second coming of Christ. But in the meantime, as the believers live in the present, they are to treat each other with sacrificial love and care.

- The Lord's Supper is a proclamation of Christ's death until He comes. This proclamation must also be by the believers' conduct of sacrificial love and care toward one another.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE LORD'S SUPPER AND THE JUDGEMENT OF GOD

We see in verses 29-32 that Paul linked the eating of the Lord's Supper with the judgment of God. In the immediate contexts, we see that he warns them that "whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord" v. 27. Before discussing these passages in detail, we need to note that Paul had been relying on the experiences of Israel in the OT.<sup>1</sup> In those passages, he pointed them to the history of Israel. That, despite the supernatural experiences of the Israelites in the wilderness, *God was not pleased* with many of them because of the four major sins they committed viz; idolatry, sexual immorality, testing the Lord and grumbling. These sins of the Israelites did not go unpunished, for God severely judged them resulting in the death of many of them.

Having observed the factionalism which was manifested at the Lord's Supper, Paul now points out the danger of partaking the Lord's Supper in ways contrary to what God expects of His covenant people. The danger is that, God will judge them for partaking of it in an unworthy manner. But before we look at what it means to partake in an unworthy manner, we need to note that Paul had earlier on in 10:1-13, given them an example of God's judgment. He took the example from Israel's history in the wilderness, so we will have to review that situation in its original context before looking at how Paul applied it to the Corinthian situation.

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<sup>1</sup>See 10: 1-12; 18.



### **God's Judgment in the Old Testament**

Paul took his example of God's judgment from the following passages: Exo. 32, Num 21:5-6; 25:1,9; 14:2,36 16:14-49, Ps. 106:25-27. Paul mentions four sins, which the Israelites committed and for which God judged them. These are:

- i) Idolatry Exo. 32 : 4-19.
- ii) Sexual immorality Num 25:1-9.
- iii) Testing the Lord Exo17:2 , Num 21:5,6; Ps 78:18, 95:9.
- iv) Grumbling. Num 16:41; 17:5,10.

The sin of idolatry relates to the worship of the golden calf, which the Israelites made and worshipped. The people did not just make an idol in the form of a calf, but they also made an altar "in front of the calf" (Exo. 32:5). They then sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings to that idol. After these offerings " they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry"(Exo. 32:6). This idolatrous practice greatly angered God and He almost wiped out the entire congregation except Moses (Exo. 32:9-10). After Moses has interceded for the people, God judged them in two ways; by direct killing and by a plague (Exo. 32: 27, 28, 35). Paul's use of this negative example would immediately draw the attention of the Corinthians to the prevailing situation in their Church where some get involved in pagan cultic meals. But most importantly, it will show them that God never spared idolatry in the past and He will not spare it now.

The second sin is sexual immorality which the Israelite men committed with Moabite women who then invited them to join in sacrificing to their pagan gods (Num25:1,2). In addition they also ate and worshipped the Moabite god Baal of Peor. This act of

religious sexual immorality so provoked God that He judged Israel with a plague, which killed twenty-four thousand people (Num. 25:3-9).

The third sin involved testing the Lord. As the people traveled, they became impatient and “spoke against God and against Moses” that there was no bread and water. Num 21:5 cf. Exo17:2 where they complained and God gave them water from a rock. This sin of ingratitude and speaking against God and His servant aroused God’s anger and he judged them by sending snakes to kill them.

Finally, in the fourth sin, the people grumbled against Moses and Aaron. The cause of the grumbling was because of the death of Korah, Dathan and Abiram and two hundred and fifty men. These had opposed Moses and God killed them (Num. 16:1-35). This did not go down well with the whole Israelite assembly so they grumbled. Their grumbling caused God to send a plague which killed about a total of fourteen thousand seven hundred people (Num. 16:49).

We note that these sins were communal sins not individual ones even though it was individuals (such as Korah) who caused the community to sin. When Paul used these as examples, he mentioned that despite the Israelites having been baptized and having eaten spiritual food (a type of the Lord’s supper), God still judged them. *And the reason for His judgment of them was because He was displeased with “most of them”* (I Cor 10: 5). *And His displeasure was on account of their disobedience to the covenant between Him and them.*

From these negative examples, Paul was showing the Corinthian believers that partaking of the Lord's Supper then is not a guarantee that one is immune from God's judgment. In fact partaking of it without living to please God will rather predispose one to God's judgment. This will become clear as we look at the judgment of God in I Corinthians.

### **God's Judgment in I Corinthians 10 and 11**

As we discuss judgment in I Corinthians, we need to keep in mind that it will be wrong to draw our conclusions only from chapter 11 where the word *judgment* is mentioned. To do that is to read the book as disjointed pieces and not as a unified whole. We therefore propose to look at the specific acts of conduct in the book, which Paul mentions as possible cases for God's judgment. In chapter 10, after dealing with the sin of idolatry in their midst, Paul asked two rhetorical questions which gave some indication of God's judgment. We have already mentioned that *behaviors which displease God bring God's judgment*. So in I Cor 10: 22 when Paul asked; "are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy?" he was clearly telling the believers that their behavior, with regards to idolatry, *was displeasing to God* and that it will lead to judgment. Particularly, their partaking of both the Lord's Supper and pagan cultic meals was in contravention of their covenantal relationship with God. This provocation of God to jealousy is a sure recipe for disaster because it will ultimately bring God's judgment. The judgment may include death, but God is the only One who will decide on the kind of judgment He should mete out.

In I Cor. 11, in the course of discussing the Lord's Supper, Paul mentions that partaking of the Lord's Supper in a way that does not please God will bring judgment

on the offender. To prove this, he applied the institution of the Lord's Supper to the abuses, (that is, an application of part two, 11: 23-26, to part one 11: 17-22) and he dealt with this in 11: 27-32.

**Verse 27:** Ὡστε ὃς ἂν ἐσθίῃ τὸν ἄρτον ἢ πίνη τὸ ποτήριον τοῦ Κυρίου ἀναξίως, ἔνοχος ἔσται τοῦ σώματος καὶ τοῦ αἵματος τοῦ Κυρίου.

**Verse 28:** δοκιμαζέτω δὲ ἑαυτὸν ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐαυτὸν καὶ οὕτως ἐκ τοῦ ἄρτου ἐσθιέτω καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ποτηρίου πινέτω·

**Verse 29:** ὁ γὰρ ἐσθίων καὶ πίνων κρίμα ἐαυτῷ ἐσθίει καὶ πίνει μὴ διακρίνων τὸ σῶμα.

**Verse 30:** διὰ τοῦτο ἐν ὑμῖν πολλοὶ ἀσθενεῖς καὶ ἄρρωστοὶ καὶ κοιμῶνται ἱκανοί.

**Verse 31:** εἰ δε ἐαυτοὺς διεκρίνομεν, οὐκ ἂν ἐκρινόμεθα·

**Verse 32:** κρινόμενοι δὲ ὑπὸ [του] Κυρίου παιδευόμεθα, ἵνα μὴ σὺν τῷ κόσμῳ κατακριθῶμεν.

27. So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty for so treating the body and blood of the Lord. 28. But let a person be examining himself, and in this manner let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. 29. For those who eat and drink in an unworthily manner, eats and drinks judgment to themselves, not discerning or, correctly judging the body of the Lord. 30. For this reason, many among you are weak, ill and many have died. 31. For if we had discerned or correctly judged ourselves, we would not have been judged. 32. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined by Him, so that we will not be condemned with the world.

The pertinent questions about God's judgment and the Lord's Supper as we find them in 11: 27-32 are; What does it mean to partake of the Lord's Supper ἀναξίως? What does it mean to be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord? Who is to examine himself or herself and how? The result of eating in an unworthy manner is judgment upon one's self and the manifestation of the judgment is weakness, sickness and death in their midst. They could have prevented this unfortunate situation if they had correctly judged themselves. The judgment of God still has some form of mercy inherent in it because the judgment was a disciplinary measure and not to destroy

them. God was only disciplining them as a father disciplines his son.<sup>2</sup> This is for their own good!

We had earlier mentioned that 1 Cor. 11: 17-34 can be divided into four parts. We have already looked at parts one, 11: 17-22, and two, 11: 23-26 (in our Chapter three). We saw that part one was about the abuses at the Lord's Supper. The abuses consisted of the rich humiliating the poor members by devouring their meals without sharing it equally with the poor. This led to the rich becoming full while the poor went hungry. In order to correct this problem in part one, Paul narrates the institution of the Lord's Supper in part two. But the mention of the institution by itself was not sufficient to deal with the problem in part one. Hence in part three, 11: 27-32, Paul now applies the institution to the abuses at the Lord's Supper. Finally he goes on in part four, 11: 33-34, to give practical suggestions to the problems in part one. We shall now look at parts three and four in this Chapter.

The third part, 11:27-32, introduces legal language as it applies the institution to the abuses. Verse 27 picks up from the 'proclaiming' in verse 26. Since their eating and drinking is a proclamation of the Lord's death until he comes, their "attitude and conduct should fit the message and solemnity of what is proclaimed."<sup>3</sup> Failure to let the attitude and conduct fit the message which is proclaimed constitute an unworthy manner. *Αναξίως* means "in an unworthy or careless manner."<sup>4</sup> *Αναξίως* here is in reference to the manner in which people eat and drink, and not to the believers

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Heb. 12: 5-7.

<sup>3</sup> Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 889.

<sup>4</sup> Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 58.

themselves. Hence, KJV's translation of it as "unworthily" misses the point.<sup>5</sup>

Ανάξτως relates the proclamation in verse 26 to the abuses in verses 20-22. So that to eat and drink in an unworthy manner means to eat and drink on the one hand whilst discriminating (or humiliating) against other believers on the other hand. Such a behavior makes one to be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. Ενοχος (to be guilty) is a legal term which means "liable, answerable" or "guilty."<sup>6</sup> It can denote the punishment of the crime or the person or thing "against who the sin has been committed."<sup>7</sup> Here it refers to the person sinned against, that is Christ. That the offence is against Christ is shown by the use of the phrase "the body and the blood of the Lord" (του σωματος και αιματος του κυριου). If Paul had used σωμα alone, then we would be inclined to see it as the Church. But the combination of "the body and blood" makes it necessary to see it as Christ and his sacrificial death on the cross (we have earlier mentioned that sin against Christ's Church is sin against Christ himself). But in this passage the focus "remains on Christ and Christ crucified, as proclaimed through a self-involving sharing in the bread and wine."<sup>8</sup> A believer's life, which does not authenticate by his conduct this proclamation shall be guilty in the sense of being "**held accountable for so treating the body and blood of the Lord.**"<sup>9</sup>

In order not to be held accountable or be found guilty, each believer is to examine himself before partaking of the Lord's Supper. Self-examination must precede the

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<sup>5</sup>Cf. Fee, *First Epistle*, 560.

<sup>6</sup>Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 267.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid. , 268.

<sup>8</sup>Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 890.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

partaking of the Lord's Supper otherwise the believer will partake without recognizing the body of the Lord and bring judgment on himself. Δοκιμαξτω means to "put to the test, examine" in order to prove ones fitness or suitability for a given task.<sup>10</sup> Such self-examination here contrasts with the unworthy manner in verse 27 (the use of the adversative conjunction δε at the beginning of verse 28 fits this). The self-examination is not necessarily an introspection of ones self (even though it may include that) but rather the believers careful consideration of his conduct towards other members of the Christian Community.<sup>11</sup> But even though the self-examination is not about self-introspection, yet we must take seriously the caution of Fee that, the self-examination "raise proper cautions about casual participation at this Table by those who are not themselves ready to come under obedience to the gospel that is here proclaimed."<sup>12</sup>

Failure to examine one's conduct toward other believers before partaking of the Lord's Supper amounts to μη το σωμα (without recognizing the body). Διακριτων means "to judge correctly" ones self (as in verse 31) or to recognize as in this verse (29).<sup>13</sup> But what is one to recognise about the body? Some (such as Godet 167), see it as referring to seeing the Lord's Supper as sacred, from ordinary food. Others (such as Fee, Robertson and Plummer et.al) see it as referring to discerning the Church on account of 10: 16,17.<sup>14</sup> Still others (such as Thiselton) see it as referring to the recognition of "what characterizes the body as different" by being mindful of the

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<sup>10</sup>Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 202.

<sup>11</sup>Cf. Fee, *First Epistle*, 562.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid. , 562.

<sup>13</sup>Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 185.

<sup>14</sup>See Fee, *First Epistle*, 563-564.

uniqueness of Christ, who is separated from others in the sense of giving himself for others in sheer grace.”<sup>15</sup> The first view misses the mark because it seems to make more of the sacramental elements than Paul intended. The view of Fee’s group seems weak on account of the fact that by referring all the way back to 10:16,17, they neglect the importance of the immediate context. The third group seems to make sense of the fullness of the immediate context and must be preferred. The failure to recognize the uniqueness of Christ, as one partakes of the Lord’s Supper, results in divine judgment on one’s self. Thiselton sees this judgment as an eschatological one.<sup>16</sup> But in light of verse 30, it seems best to look at the judgment as having begun in their midst, even if it has an eschatological dimension.<sup>17</sup> For in verse 30, Paul shows them the result of their eating and drinking without recognizing the body. The result is physical weakness, sickness and death as implied by the use of *δια τουτο*, which we take to mean “result.” *ασθενεις*, *αρρωστοι* and *κοιμωνται*, need not be taken in the spiritual sense.<sup>18</sup> *αρρωστοι* means “sick, ill” and literally refer to being powerless.<sup>19</sup> *ασθενεις* means ‘bodily weakness’ and often refers to sickness or disease.<sup>20</sup> Lenski suggests that “*ασθενεις* and *αρρωστοι* are practical synonyms, both denote ailments.”<sup>21</sup> *Κοιμωνται* refers to “literal sleep, but figuratively to death.”<sup>22</sup> Thiselton reminds us that the earlier mention of drunkenness (in 11:21) may lead to a

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<sup>15</sup>Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 893.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid. , 894.

<sup>17</sup>Cf Fee, *First Epistle*, 565.

<sup>18</sup>See Lenski who argues that the terms refer to physical ailments and death, not spiritual ailments. Lenski, *I and II Corinthians*, 483.

<sup>19</sup>Bauer, Arndt, Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 109.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. , 115.

<sup>21</sup>Lenski, *I and II Corinthians*, 483.

<sup>22</sup>Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 437.



“serious decline in health.”<sup>23</sup> But despite the mention of drunkenness, we need to see the ailments and deaths as a result of divine judgments (even if there was no mention of drunkenness). This is confirmed by verse 32, where Paul says ‘when we are judged by the Lord.’ The judging by the Lord is a divine act and does not need to depend on the issue of drunkenness.

If the Corinthian believers are to curtail this judgment from the Lord, then they must judge themselves. Verse 31 is parallel to verse 28 in that *ει δε εαυτους διεκρινομεν* (of 11:31) corresponds to *δοκιμαζετω δε ανθρωπος εαυτον* (11:28). Hence, *διεκρινομεν* is referring to carefully examining one’s conduct toward other believers to see if one has been walking right toward the other. Where one finds his conduct as not measuring up, the believer is to repent. Repentance here does not refer to a change of mind only but a change of conduct also. In this way, the believer will not come under divine judgment. But God’s judgment must not be taken as negative. For this judgment is actually a discipline, performing an “educative role” in the life of the believer in order for Him not to condemn the believer along with the world.<sup>24</sup> Paul gave practical suggestions (in verses 33 and 34) on how they can avoid the judgment of God. It is by waiting for one another in a loving concern for each other.

Verses 33 and 34 form the final part of Paul’s teaching about the Lord’s Supper.

**Verse 33:** Ὡστε, ἀδελφοί μου, συνερχόμενοι εἰς τὸ φαγεῖν ἀλλήλους ἐκδέχεσθε.

**Verse 34:** εἴ τις πεινᾷ, ἐν οἴκῳ ἐσθιέτω, ἵνα μὴ εἰς κρῖμα συνέρχησθε. Τὰ δὲ λοιπὰ ὡς ἂν ἔλθῳ διατάξομαι.

33 So then, my brothers when you come together to eat, wait for one another.

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<sup>23</sup>Thiselton, *First, Epistle*, 894.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid. 898. Cf. Fee, *First Epistle*, 566.

34 If anyone is hungry, let the person eat at home, so that you will not be coming together for judgment. But concerning the remaining issues, whenever I come I will give instructions.

The inferential conjunction *ὥστε* refers back to his discussion in part three, verses 27-32. Here Paul gives a practical address to a practical problem (in verse 17-22). When they gather together, as a church, to partake of the Lord's Supper, they must wait for one another. *Ἐκδεχέσθε* means "to expect or wait for someone."<sup>25</sup> Winter and Fee have argued for seeing *Ἐκδεχέσθε* as to receive one another.<sup>26</sup> But Thiselton has shown that the lexicographical basis for such a view is not strong.<sup>27</sup> It seems likely that both 'to wait for' and 'receive' are in view here. The rich are to wait for the poor and when all are gathered together, the rich are to receive the poor by sharing their food with them in the spirit of *κοινωνία*. But if the rich want to eat extra, or are hungry and want to have their private dinners, then they should eat at home before coming together as a Church. So that when they come together they can wait for each other and partake of the Lord's Supper as equal brothers and sisters in the Lord. In this way, their meeting will not result in the kind of judgment which has befallen them (as mentioned in 29 and 30). Paul still had some things to share with them (which may include both the Lord's Supper and other issues), but that will have to wait until he gets to them.

From this section we see that God was judging them because their social conduct towards one another was not consistent with the Lord's Supper they were partaking. Such inconsistency especially at the Lord's Table was a breach of the covenant

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<sup>25</sup>Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 238

<sup>26</sup>Winter, *After Paul left Corinth*, 151-152; Fee, *First Epistle*, 568.

<sup>27</sup>Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 899.

between them and God. This was displeasing to God, hence the judgment. They needed to recognize that the Lord's Supper is a "symbolic accomplishment of social integration."<sup>28</sup> Their judgment was due to the fact that, what they brought to the community as a common meal for all was treated by the rich as private meal for themselves alone. Their behavior was similar to what we find in the book of Acts 5. There, God was very displeased with Ananias and Sapphira for treating "common property, consecrated to God, as if it were private property."<sup>29</sup> We know from Acts 5, that God judged both Sapphira and Ananias by striking them dead (5:5,10).

On the individual level, one who partakes of the Lord's Supper and at the same time also partakes of pagan cultic meals will be liable to God's judgment (10:14-22). We need not to restrict God's judgment to only chapter eleven. In chapter ten, Paul's negative example from Israel's history and the way he used it as the basis of advising them against idolatry must inform us that God's judgment was implied. And that, the kind of judgment God metes out is determined only by God. Partaking of the Lord's Supper is a very serious issue, because of the fact that as the believer partakes of it his or her conduct must conform to certain standards of the word of God. To partake of it and fail to live according to those biblical standards (which we have examined in our study) is to invite God's judgment. The Church today need to look at this issue with all the seriousness it deserves. With this in mind, we shall look at how the members of the Methodist Church in Kenya have been practicing this Sacrament and how we can apply our findings from this study to their practice.

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<sup>28</sup>Theissen, *The Social setting of Pauline Christianity*, 167.

<sup>29</sup>Schottroff, "Holiness and Justice: Exegetical comments on 1 Corinthians 11:17-34," 54.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SUMMARY, APPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

#### Summary of our Findings

From our studies, we can summarise our findings as follows: That the Lord's Supper is a commemoration of the Last Supper which Jesus ate on the night on which he was handed over to death. On that night Jesus and his disciples ate that meal as a Passover meal. The Passover is a feast, which celebrates the mighty acts of God in delivering Israel from Egypt. But it also looks forward to the coming of the Messiah whom God will send to restore the fortunes of Israel in accordance with God's covenant promises to Israel. When Jesus celebrated the Passover feast, he transformed it and gave it a new meaning. The new meaning is that by his death he is setting up a new covenant community for God. He was also declaring to all and sundry that He is the Messiah. This new covenant people are united to Him and to one another. They form His Body, the Church, and are to conduct their lives by emulating His example of self-sacrifice and service to God and to others. Their covenantal bonding to Him and to one another is what they celebrate in the Lord's Supper.

This covenantal bonding to Him therefore prohibits them from seeking another bonding or participation with other gods through pagan cultic meals. This is because Christ and demons are enemies and incompatible with each other. Hence those who partake of the Lord's Supper must not partake of pagan cultic meals because it is a

serious breach of the covenant between the believer and God. Such breach of the covenant is a provocation of God and will lead to His judgment.

The meaning of the Lord's Supper is that Christ has formed a new covenant people (or community) of God. And that Christ is the Head or Lord of this covenant community. And the Lord's Supper is the celebration of Christ's death by which he set up this community. It also means that the members of this community are equal before Him and devoid of any form of distinction on the basis of race, social standing, gender or what so ever. Also that these members are united to one another and must treat one another with sacrificial love and care. Also that since the members are joined to Christ by a covenant, they are forbidden from any other covenantal relationship with any other deity. This whole meaning of the Lord's Supper must be taught diligently to all members of the Methodist Church in Kenya (and indeed to all believers elsewhere).

Since the Lord's Supper is a celebration of the covenantal bonding between Christ and the believers and among the believers themselves, it must reflect on the *conduct* of the participants. Their *conduct* must be one of selfless service to God and to one another. Sacrificial love and care for one another must characterize the conduct of those who partake of the Lord's Supper. The words of institution in the Lord's Supper is a reminder of Christ's sacrificial self-giving to God and to others. It is this attitude, which must characterize those who partake of the Lord's Supper. The lives of those who partake must be free from every form of selfness and discrimination against other believers. Partaking of it whilst walking in selfness and discrimination against fellow believers will bring God's judgment.

This is because partaking of it and treating other believers with contempt and humiliation is to partake in an unworthy manner. And partaking in such an unworthy manner is what brings God's judgment. However, such judgment is not a disapproval of the believer as a member of Christ's body but rather a disapproval of the believer's conduct. The judgment may result in physical weakness, sickness or even physical death or whatever God may deem necessary. The judgment is a form of discipline of the believer and not a condemnation of him along with unbelievers. In view of the danger of being judged, each believer must examine his conduct toward other believers before partaking of the Lord's Supper. The believer who properly examines himself and treats his fellow believers in a just manner need not fear about God's judgment.

All these things, which happened in the Corinthian Church and for which Paul wrote, serve as example to the present generation of Christians. So indeed, we can apply principles from the Corinthian situation to the Methodist Church in Kenya.

#### **Application to the Methodist Church in Kenya (M.C.K.)**

The Methodist Church in Kenya (MCK) was founded in 1862 through the instrumentality of Dr. Johann Ludwig Krapt.<sup>1</sup> This was among the coastal people near the Tana River.<sup>2</sup> With time the Church spread from the coast to Meru and other parts of Kenya and became a district of the British Methodist Conference until it gained autonomy in 1967.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Nthamburi, *A History of the Methodist Church in Kenya*, 14.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid. , 149.

The hierarchical structure of the Church starts with the Congregations (also called the Societies), to the Circuits to the Synods and finally to the Conference or Connexion. A group of societies form a Circuit headed by a Superintendent Minister. And a group of Circuits form a Synod headed by a Bishop. All the Synods together form the conference which is headed by a Bishop. Currently there are eight Synods across the country. And the Conference is currently headed by the Rt. Rev. Dr Stephen Kanyaru I'mpwi. The conference is the Governing body of the Church and is guided by the *Standing Orders and Agenda*.<sup>4</sup>

The administration of the Lord's Supper is one of two sacraments the Church has been practicing since its inception. The other one is baptism, which is the ceremony by which a person is accepted into the membership of the church (S.O. 72).<sup>5</sup> As we had mentioned earlier, the MCK has no comprehensive document on the Lord's Supper. So any evaluation of their practice can only be carried out on the basis of what is mentioned about it in their Standing Orders. The Standing Orders, at various points, give various directions on the practical aspects of the administration of the Lord's Supper. We shall now look at these vis-à-vis Paul's teaching about the celebration of the Lord's Supper which we have examined in 1 Corinthians 10 and 11.

*Who qualifies to partake of the Holy Communion?:* In the MCK, those who qualify to partake of the Lord's Supper must be baptized and confirmed members.<sup>6</sup> In the passages we studied, there is no mention of any particular qualification on which people are to be admitted to partake of the Lord's Supper. However, given that Paul

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<sup>4</sup>*Standing Orders and Agenda*, 2.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid. , 53.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid. , 58.

addressed them as “the Church of God” (11: 22) and given that in the New Testament, the Church of God refers to those who have believed and confessed Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, we hold that these were believers in Jesus Christ.<sup>7</sup> If we take into account the early Church’s practice of baptizing those who believe as soon as possible, then those who were admitted to the Lord’s Table were baptized believers. So in the case of the MCK, only baptized believers must be admitted to the Holy Communion. Marshall has pointed out that unbaptized believers must be allowed to partake but it “would be normal for such persons to undergo baptism without delay.”<sup>8</sup> We would urge that the time between ones salvation and ones baptism must not be delayed so that new believers become fellow partakers at the Lord’s Table as soon as possible. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, earlier on in the Methodist ministry “denied persons who were not baptized members of the Church of England.”<sup>9</sup> Later on, he “apparently offered the Eucharist to all those who wished to participate, emphasizing the converting power of the sacrament and the universality of grace in the gospel.”<sup>10</sup> We are not sure whether Wesley’s latter practice and explanation can be supported by the scriptures, so it would be more prudent to restrict it to the baptized believers. From our study, we also are not sure whether the MCK’s practice of admitting only baptized and confirmed persons can be supported by the scriptures. But since the MCK’s confirmation is the means of one becoming a full member of the Church, then it would be more appropriate not to delay baptism and confirmation.

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<sup>7</sup>In 1 Cor. 1:2-10, Paul described the Corinthian Christians as sanctified, holy, called of God, and other names which refer to believers. Cf. Rom. 10:9,10; Eph. 2:6-9. Acts 2:42-47.

<sup>8</sup>Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord’s Supper*, 156.

<sup>9</sup>Dean G. Blevins, “The Trinity and the Means of Grace: A Sacramental Interrelationship,” *Wesleyan Theological Journal* 36, no. 1 (2001): 231-255. 239.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.* , 239.



As we look at who qualifies to partake of the Lord's Supper, the question "What about children partaking of it?" is a pertinent one and must not be ignored. This issue has been discussed with great passion among Christians. In the MCK, young people around the age of twelve are admitted after they have been confirmed.<sup>11</sup> Marshall suggests that age should not be a barrier, because "what matters is faith and an understanding of what is happening appropriate to the age of the participant."<sup>12</sup> We may have to add that since in the early Church the Lord's Supper was eaten as part of a meal in the homes of the believers, it is difficult to assume that they excluded their children from it. So where the faith of a child can be established, then that child should be allowed to partake of the Holy Communion.

Who qualifies to administer the Holy Communion?: In our study the head of the household (where the Church is meeting at any given time) and his household will be the ones administering the Lord's Supper. This is because the Lord's Supper was part of the common meal, which the believers take when they gather together. In the MCK, ordained Ministers are the ones mandated to administer the Lord's Supper.<sup>13</sup> But dispensation is also given to Probationer Ministers and lay people to administer, if the need arises and where congregations "will be deprived of reasonably frequent celebration..."<sup>14</sup> Hence, Marshall's advice that the administration should not be

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<sup>11</sup>See SO 75 (7).

<sup>12</sup>Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper*, 156. See Horrell who argues along the same line. D. Horrell, "The Lord's Supper at Corinth and in the Church Today," *Theology* 98 (1995) : 196-202, 201

<sup>13</sup>SO 80 (3a), *Standing Orders and Agenda*, 58.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid. 58-59; SO 80 (3d). Also 80 (3b,c).

confined to the ordained ministry “but should be open to any believer authorised by the Church to do so” is well taken care of in the MCK.<sup>15</sup>

An important question which every Christian and denomination faces is “*On what criteria must somebody be excluded from partaking of the Holy Communion?*” The Methodist Church in Kenya is not exempted from grappling with such a critical question. The two passages in 1 Cor 10:14-22; 17-34 do not deal explicitly with the criteria of who should be excluded from the Lord’s Supper. However, if we consider the fact that 1 Corinthians was written as a whole, we can then gather some principle from other parts of the book to help us determine who should be excluded from it. We have seen that, in 1 Cor. 5, the believer who was living in sexual immorality was to be excluded from the table fellowship of the Church.<sup>16</sup> Paul also included anyone who claims to be a believer but “is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, or a drunkard or a swindler.” (1 Cor. 5: 11). So basically anyone who is walking in open disobedience to the gospel must be excluded because one is denying by his or her life the gospel he or she proclaims in the Lord’s Supper. In the MCK, any person who is placed under discipline (for whatever reason) is automatically excluded from the Lord’s Supper.<sup>17</sup> And when the person is being restored, after the discipline, he or she is to be received “at a service of the Holy Communion.”<sup>18</sup> A person who absents himself consistently from the Lord’s Supper and from other

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<sup>15</sup>Marshall, *Lord’s Last Supper and Lord’s Supper*, 156.

<sup>16</sup>See our discussion on this on page 40-41. Also we need to remember Fee’s admonition that we should exercise proper caution about those who partake without willing to place themselves “under the obedience to the gospel that is here proclaimed,” Fee, *First Epistle*, 562.

<sup>17</sup>SO 84(3), *Standing Orders and Agenda*, 62, 63.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*; SO 84 (3e).

Church fellowships, without good reason shall be liable for discipline.<sup>19</sup> Such a person risks expulsion from the Church if he fails to respond to the encouragement of the Pastors and Leaders.<sup>20</sup> This is because the MCK regard the Lord's Supper as a "means of grace."<sup>21</sup> A means of grace is an outward means by which God's imparts His grace to the believer.<sup>22</sup>

Since the Lord's Supper is another form of preaching, it means that the partakers are the "preachers" for there is no preaching without a preacher. As preachers therefore, the lives of the partakers must be in conformity with all that Christ lived and died for. This particular area needs to be carefully explained to all the members because there are many people whose lives do not conform to the Christian standard of holy living, yet they partake of the Holy Communion regularly. *Most importantly our conduct towards other believers need to be addressed. Any form of discrimination, be it on the basis of tribe, sex, race, academic or social standing, must be eliminated.* MCK believers need to understand that the family of God is one and they must find practical ways of living out their faith as one people. Caring for the needs of the poor and the marginalized in our congregations is one of such practical ways of expressing selfless acts of service to God and to others. In the MCK, it is customary that members give toward helping the poor and the needy. Such giving is commendable but there is the need to properly teach the members the biblical basis for doing it and especially why we do that on Holy Communion Sundays. The growing individualism and all its social class distinctions in the urban areas need to be challenged. We must take

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid. 61; SO 84 (1).

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>See Blevins who quotes Wesley on this. Blevins, "The Trinity and the Means of Grace," 233.

seriously Horrell's exhortation that the Holy Communion "should certainly not express a religiosity in which isolated individuals assure themselves of their salvation, but rather, as a celebration which is intrinsically communal, should present a sharp challenge to any who would like to relate to the Lord without relating to their sisters and brothers in Christ."<sup>23</sup>

*How often must we celebrate it?:* Currently in many Methodist congregations, the Holy Communion is celebrated once a month and in others it is on quarterly basis. Ideally, it should be on a weekly basis, but in view of the fact that its celebration demands adequate time (so that the whole process is not rushed) once or twice in a month should be enough. From our study, we saw that the early Church celebrated it at least once a week.<sup>24</sup> It will be also good to partake of it during special occasions such as special times of prayer and fasting (also special times like Circuit, Synod and Connexional meetings). Special meetings of the Youth, Women and Men's fellowships should also partake of it in order to remind them of their unity and fellowship in the presence of their Lord. Also in light of the fact that the Holy Communion was part of actual meal eating in the NT, it would be appropriate if once in a while, the congregations organize a love feast at which the Holy Communion is served at the end. This will not be easy to organize but with careful planning, it is possible.

We have already shown that partaking in an unworthy manner displeases God and brings His judgment on the offenders. For this reason, it is important to carefully

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<sup>23</sup>Horrell, "The Lord's Supper at Corinth and in the Church Today," 201.

<sup>24</sup>See our discussion on page 84, 85.

instruct believers about the solemnness of the Lord's Supper and the seriousness of eating it in an unworthy manner.<sup>25</sup> Members must be encouraged to seek the Lord in repentance immediately they become conscious of any sin in their lives. They must be particularly conscious of sins against their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Those who persist in open sin must be excluded from eating. However, believers must be taught not to eat in a spirit of fear but rather out of joy and gratitude to the Lord for all that He has done for us by His life, death and resurrection. The ceremony is an occasion to remember all that Christ has accomplished for the believer and this, calls for celebration not fear. John Wesley has addressed the objections of those who have various fears about the Lord's Supper, which prevent them from partaking of it.<sup>26</sup> Particularly those who felt that they need time to prepare or that they are unworthy to partake, Wesley counters that, all that one needs is true repentance and obedience.<sup>27</sup> We have already shown that the unworthy manner is not in reference to the believer as a person but rather his conduct toward other believers.<sup>28</sup>

From 10: 14-22, we see that partaking of the Holy Communion is incompatible with evil associations. All associations which conflict with our Christian faith and which have covenantal attachments, such as involvement with unbelievers at pagan altars are prohibited. Today we find three kinds of unchristian altars in our midst; altars of non-Christian temples such as Hindu and Buddhist's temples; altars of secret societies such as Freemasons; and altars or shrines of African traditional religions. With the many Hindu, Buddhist and other non-Christian temples and shrines in many parts of Kenya,

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<sup>25</sup>Cf. Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper*, 156.

<sup>26</sup>See Blevins, "The Trinity and the Means of Grace," 239, 240.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid. 240.

<sup>28</sup>See our discussion on this on page 91-93.

our members need to know that it is against their Christian faith to participate in any of these temple ceremonies. A look at these Hindu and Buddhist temples reveal a great number of all kinds of idols. Other temples are the meeting places of the Freemasons (and other secret societies) but because they are disguised, many people do not consider them as temples or as shrines. Harris, a former Freemason who rose to the rank of a Worshipful master has clearly shown in his book *Freemasonry* that the meeting places or lodges of the freemasons are temples.<sup>29</sup> He has also shown that the god of the freemasons is not the Father, Son and Holy Spirit of Christianity.<sup>30</sup> The Church needs to warn her members to stay clear of these secret societies. Also believers need to be warned of some of the traditional religious practices, which include eating at the shrine of idols in the name of cultural practices. Mbiti mentions quite a number of such practices in his discussion of African beliefs and practices.<sup>31</sup> We may have to add that idolatry is more than just the worship of idols, and includes anything which we put in place of God or anything which we value more than God. So today, we have idolatry in the form of entertainment, sports, riches, pleasure and many other things, which engage the attention and passion of people over and above God. Our members need to know that they ought shun all such forms of idolatry.

In view of all that we have gathered from this study, how are believers to live their lives, both privately and publicly, as they partake of the Lord's Supper? Believers must live their lives as God's covenant people by emulating the example of their Master Jesus Christ, who gave Himself in sacrifice and service to God and others.

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<sup>29</sup>Jack Harris, *Freemasonry: The Invisible Cult in our Midst* (Springdale, PA: Whitaker House, 1983), 13.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 98.

<sup>31</sup>John S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy* (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1969).

### **Conclusion**

We have seen that the Lord's Supper is a ceremony, which proclaims the death of Jesus Christ by recalling all that Jesus did to establish a new covenant people of God. As it recalls the past of Christ's work at Calvary, it also looks to the future when Jesus shall come back for His Church. But it also focuses on the present where believers (as God's covenant people) are to relate to one another in sacrificial love and care. The Methodist Church in Kenya is on the right path by observing this ceremony. However, it needs to teach its members more about the full significance of the Lord's Supper especially in the area of inter-personal relationships among the believers. So that the believers' conduct toward one another will be that of love and care, free of discrimination of any kind.

### **Suggestion for further research**

There is the need to do a field research among the members of the MCK to establish their perception of the sacrament of the Holy Communion. Such a study must target both the Ministers and the laity. The study should be followed by a comprehensive write-up, which addresses all the concerns of the members from the biblical point of view. The write up should also include a section on the explanation of the MCK theological position on the Lord's Supper.

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