

Discerning the Body 05-09-21

In 1 Corinthians 11:23-34 Paul speaks to problems in the Corinthian church in regards to their coming together for the Lord's Supper. One of the interesting aspects of this is verses 28-29 where Paul says "*But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.*". What does Paul mean when he says we must discern the body of the Lord? Perhaps it is not what we might think.

First, let us take a moment and consider the greater context of the passage. The entire book might be summed up in the idea of spiritual unity. Paul stressed unity by doctrinal accord. Even their problems with the Lord's Supper are based in their lack of unity. Earlier Paul said "*The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake of that one bread.*" (1 Corinthians 10:16-17). As we see, the body here is the bread, and the covenant is the cup. The dilemma is that they are disunited at communion; they are not waiting for each other and they are not partaking in the right mind.

What is communion? You might be surprised to know that it is only mentioned a few times in Scripture (3 in the NKJV and NASB), and the context of the three passages is NOT referring to the Lord's Supper. 1 Corinthians 10 (above) speaks about our "Communion of the blood/body of Christ"; 2 Corinthians 6 asks "What communion has light with darkness", and the benediction of Paul in 2 Corinthians 13 speaks to "The communion of the Holy Spirit". None of these references speak to the Lord's Supper. Yet the term "Communion" (think communion = common union) does accurately describe our relationship with one another when we are partaking of the Lord's Supper. This is because the term reminds us that we are united by what we have in common, the Blood of Christ (covenant) and the Body of Christ (the church).

This leads us to our question. What does it mean to discern the body of Christ, if the body of Christ in context is the church? To discern means to understand. How do we "understand" the church? We might point out that the church is the Body of Christ, who is the head (Ephesians 5:23, Colossians 1:18). We can also say that the church is the collection of those saved (1 Corinthians 1:2, 1 Timothy 3:15). The church is the manifested kingdom (Hebrews 12:22-28, Colossians 1:13) and it is the Temple of God (1 Corinthians 3:16, 2 Corinthians 6:16). But perhaps what we need to see when we are in communion with one another and Christ during the Lord's Supper is that the church IS Christ; the church is the manifestation of Christ.

We need to be thinking of one another when we are participating in the Lord's Supper. We are declaring that those with whom we partake are those who are going to heaven. We need to be present with one another as a visible assembly of Christians. We need to understand that the church of Christ is Christ manifested among us. To forsake this assembly is in fact to forsake Christ.