

I. Discernment of the Lord's Table

Scripture Reading

1 Corinthians 11:17-19 But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse. For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you. And I believe it in part, for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized.

As seen from the following verse twenty, the gathering spoken of here refers to the breaking of bread meeting. According to what is stated here, some meetings for breaking bread do not benefit people but bring them harm, for those who gather are divided among themselves. This is the first and primary reason. When believers gather to break bread, they testify to the oneness of the body of Christ, which is the church. If those who partake in breaking bread are at odds and divided from one another, or if such a meeting is held on the ground of denominational division rather than the oneness of the church, this kind of breaking of bread contradicts the nature of church oneness and damages the unity of the church, leaving participants harmed instead of edified. Therefore, whenever we intend to join a breaking of bread gathering, we must discern whether its standing is divisive or unifying, whether it is denominational or church-based. We need to tell if there are elements of division and denominational leanings in such meetings, lest we gain no profit but suffer loss through our participation.

Scripture Reading

1 Corinthians 11:20-21 When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk.

The apostle warns us here that certain gatherings for breaking bread cannot be regarded as partaking of the Lord's Supper. The first reason is the division mentioned earlier. In the eyes of both the apostle and the Lord, breaking bread based on divisions or denominational grounds is not truly partaking of the Lord's Supper. The bread broken at the Lord's Supper signifies the whole body of Christ and testifies to the oneness of the church, His body. If bread is broken upon denominational divisions or with such divisive elements involved, it conflicts with the nature of church unity, loses the testimony and true meaning of breaking bread, and thus is not counted as genuine breaking of bread.

Christ is not divided, and the church is one united body. Therefore, all who belong to Christ in the church ought not to split into factions, let alone form denominations and claim allegiance to certain sects. By breaking bread, believers positively witness the unity of the church, and meanwhile declare that divisions have no place and denominations hold no standing. Yet some break bread merely on denominational grounds with divisive mindsets, no wonder the Holy Spirit speaks through the apostle that such practice is not the Lord's Supper.

Another reason why such breaking bread is not the Lord's Supper is that people confuse this sacred observance with ordinary personal meals. This was exactly what the Corinthians did. While intending to keep the Lord's Supper, they prioritized their own food, leaving the poor hungry and the wealthy intoxicated. Such conduct distorts the essence of the Lord's Supper and voids its spiritual significance, making it no true partaking of the Lord's Supper. We must never treat the Lord's Supper as common food nor take breaking bread lightly. We ought to preserve its sacred nature and honor its lofty spiritual meaning. Otherwise our practice will be corrupted and utterly futile,

bringing us harm instead of spiritual benefit.

Scripture Reading

1 Corinthians 11:27 Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord.

According to the apostle's words here, people may partake of the breaking of bread in an unworthy way. The original word for "in an unworthy manner" means being unqualified. To break bread while being unqualified is to do so improperly. At the very least, this improper practice covers two faults mentioned earlier: creating divisions, and treating the Lord's Supper as something common. All who break bread out of division or regard the Lord's Supper as ordinary are acting unworthily and unfitly. Such conduct makes them guilty of profaning the Lord's body and blood.

The Lord gave up His body for us that we might receive His life and become His mystical one body. He shed His blood to qualify us to partake of His life and be built up as this mystical body. This is what we declare and testify when we eat the bread and drink the cup. If we break bread in a divisive spirit or on denominational grounds, we ruin the testimony of the church as the unified mystical body of Christ. If we treat the Lord's Supper lightly, we nullify the unique significance of Christ's suffering and redemption. Thus we truly offend His body and blood, which ought never to happen.

Furthermore, prior to this verse, the apostle teaches that breaking bread is to remember the Lord, proclaim His death and await His return by partaking of His bread and cup. Therefore, eating the bread and drinking the cup unworthily also includes failing to walk in this truth. Any breaking of bread that does not involve enjoying the Lord, remembering Him, declaring His death and looking forward to His coming is improper. Mere nominal church members and unsaved false believers have no spiritual life of the Lord within them. They cannot truly remember the Lord, proclaim His death or wait for His return. If they partake of the bread and the cup, they surely do so unworthily and become guilty of offending the Lord's body and

blood, which is utterly wrong.

Scripture Reading

1 Corinthians 11:28 Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

Since it is possible to partake of the breaking of bread in an unworthy manner and thus be guilty against the Lord's body and blood, we must take personal responsibility to examine and discern ourselves whenever we intend to join such a gathering. To examine means to check the nature of the bread-breaking meeting: whether it is rooted in division, held on denominational grounds with divisional elements, treated as a common meal, or whether the sacred significance of this observance is duly honored. Self-examination covers not only the stance and state of the meeting but also our own inner motives and spiritual condition. We need to see if we hold divisive views or denominational prejudices within the church, if we are at variance with fellow believers, if we regard the Lord's Supper lightly and trivialize it, and whether our daily life matches the testimony of breaking bread.

To discern means to identify the true meaning of the bread: whether it signifies both the Lord's sacrificed body and the mystical body of Christ, stands for the entire universal church, testifies to the oneness of the church, proves that though we are many, we are one bread and one body, and represents solely the unique church rather than any sect or denomination. If we confirm the bread represents the whole body of Christ and bears witness to church unity, we must further examine ourselves to see if we live in peace and harmony with all fellow saints and members without strife or estrangement, and whether we harbor jealousy, dislike or cold affection toward any brothers and sisters.

We must conduct such thorough examination and discernment. We need to ensure the meeting is free from division and worldly casualness, and that we ourselves are free from sectarian mindsets, conflicts with brethren, and irreverent attitudes toward

the Lord's bread and cup. We ought to confirm the bread stands for the complete body of Christ and declares church unity, and that we maintain unbroken fellowship with all saints. Only then may we rightly participate, eat the bread and drink the cup.

Otherwise, we will offend the Lord's body and blood and eat and drink judgment upon ourselves. The original text denotes bringing condemnation upon oneself, meaning such careless participation will bring divine judgment. Without sincere self-examination and spiritual discernment, breaking bread will only bring us spiritual loss and condemnation, a truth we must never take lightly.

Scripture Reading

1 Corinthians 11:31-34 But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged by the Lord. But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world. So then, my brothers, when you come together to eat, wait for one another. If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that when you gather together you may not bring judgment on yourselves. The rest I will settle when I come.

The phrase "bring sin upon yourselves" here literally means "bring judgment upon yourselves" in the original text, and the gathering in question refers specifically to the meeting for breaking bread. This reveals that partaking in such a gathering may cause us to incur sin and draw divine judgment. Therefore, wherever we intend to join in breaking bread, we must first make thorough discernment and sincere self-examination before deciding to take part. If we do so, we will escape being judged, avoid incurring sin and inviting judgment, and keep ourselves from suffering spiritual loss. Hence, we ought to earnestly discern and examine ourselves concerning the breaking of bread.

II. Chastisement of the Lord's Table

Scripture Reading

1 Corinthians 11:17 But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse.

1 Corinthians 11:34 If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, so that when you gather together you may not bring judgment on yourselves. The rest I will settle when I come.

When we gather to break bread, if we partake of the Lord's bread and cup in an unworthy manner and thus offend the Lord's body and blood, we will suffer loss and bring judgment and condemnation upon ourselves. Any divisive mindset, partaking on denominational grounds, or treating the Lord's Supper as something common will cause us to incur sin, invite divine judgment and receive chastening.

Scripture Reading

1 Corinthians 11:29 For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.

If we fail to discern that the bread we break signifies the Lord's physical body laid down to establish His mystical body, and that it stands for the entire body of Christ, the universal church, and partake casually without such discernment, we eat and drink judgment upon ourselves, bringing condemnation and chastisement upon our own lives.

Scripture Reading

1 Corinthians 11:30 That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.

The believers in Corinth brought chastisement upon themselves for partaking of the breaking of bread improperly without self-examination and spiritual discernment. As a result, many among them became weak, fell ill, and some even passed away. Because some partook of the Lord's bread and cup in an unworthy way, the Lord caused their bodies to grow weak as a warning. When they ignored this warning and continued to offend the Lord's body and blood, the Lord sent heavier discipline and afflicted them with sickness. Even after receiving such severe chastisement, they still refused to examine and discern themselves, so the Lord finally brought the ultimate punishment, even death. How solemn this truth is, and what a grave warning it brings to us.

Many believers today suffer physical weakness, sickness or even face the brink of death after salvation. Could it be entirely unrelated to their improper participation in the Lord's Supper, their lack of self-examination and discernment, and their offence against the Lord's body and blood? Could it have nothing to do with eating and drinking judgment upon themselves and incurring the Lord's disciplinary chastening in breaking bread?

May all brothers and sisters who are weak, sick or in poor health seek the Lord's enlightenment, accept His warning and correct their ways in partaking the Lord's Supper, so as to escape divine judgment and chastisement. May all who have received the Lord's salvation examine ourselves rightly and discern carefully concerning the breaking of bread, lest we bring judgment upon ourselves and suffer discipline from the Lord.