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SHOULD YOU OBSERVE THE LORD'S SUPPER?

Over the years many people have been confused about what the Apostle Paul meant in 1 Corinthians 11:20. Many churches have twisted this verse to justify establishing a custom which they call "the Lord's Supper". So let's have a close look at this verse.

When ye come together therefore into one place, [this] is **not** to eat **the Lord's supper**. (1 Corinthians 11:20, KJV)

To correctly understand what Paul was speaking about, we should understand the facts about what was happening in Corinth. We need to keep this account in the right perspective. So here is the context for this statement.

1) In this epistle Paul was **correcting** the Corinthians! They were doing **many things wrong!** The things they did wrong also included how they observed the Passover!

2) In the entire Bible the expression "Lord's Supper" is used **only one time**, here in 1 Corinthians 11:20. And, as I will show, there it is a mistranslation. The expression is never used anywhere else! It is therefore imperative that we understand correctly what Paul is saying in this verse. We also need to understand **why** Paul says what he does say!

3) None of the apostles who observed that last Passover with Jesus Christ ever referred to what Christ commanded them to observe as "Lord's Supper"! **Paul had not been present at that occasion.** Why would Paul have invented a new term for something in which Peter, James, John and Matthew took part, but which term those participants themselves never used at any time?

4) **Why** would Paul refer to eating a small piece of bread and drinking a sip of wine as "**a supper**"? To do so would be a ridiculous exaggeration!

5) Yet the account makes very clear that **some of the Corinthians** themselves were in fact having **a full meal!** How did they possibly justify coming to Church and having a full meal at the Passover service? Was Paul aware of the justification they used?

6) In this letter Paul repeatedly refers to things which the Corinthians were very familiar with, and which he therefore did not need to explain in great detail.

For example:

- the Corinthians **knew** exactly what divisions Paul was referring to (1 Corinthians 1:12);
- they **knew** who the people were that were involved in fornication (1 Corinthians 5:1);
- they **knew** which members were involved in a court case (1 Corinthians 6:1);
- they **knew** exactly what the questions about marriage, divorce and remarriage had been (1 Corinthians 7:1);

- they **knew** exactly what Paul meant by "things offered unto idols" (1 Corinthians 8:1);
- they **knew** exactly why Paul addressed the subject of hair-length (1 Corinthians 11:13-15);
- and **they also knew** exactly what Paul meant the only time he ever used the expression incorrectly translated as "the Lord's supper"!

7) It is clear that Jesus Christ at no stage instructed the apostles to observe a full meal, i.e. "a supper"! In fact, the gospel accounts are clear in showing that **the meal** Christ had **was not to be commemorated at all**. It was only after the meal had been completed, that Jesus Christ then instituted the bread and the wine for the new way to observe the Passover.

Notice how Luke records this:

And He took bread, and gave thanks, and brake *it*, and gave unto them, saying, This is My body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of Me. Likewise also the cup **after supper**, saying, This cup *is* the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you. (Luke 22:19-20)

This agrees fully with Paul's account:

After the same manner also *He took* the cup, **when He had supped**, saying, This cup is the new testament in My blood: this do you, as oft as you drink *it*, in remembrance of Me. (1 Corinthians 11:25)

The supper had been completed, and **then** Jesus Christ introduced the new emblems for observing the Passover for Christians today.

So the point is: the bread and the wine for the New Testament Passover were only instituted **after** the meal had been concluded. These new symbols really have nothing to do with any "supper". And it is ridiculous to refer to the Passover as "the Lord's **supper**".

8) Next, let's ask some questions: **who** actually did "the eating and drinking" when this New Testament Passover was instituted? **Why** would it be called "the supper of the Lord"? **Did "the Lord" actually do any eating?**

No, He didn't!

Jesus Christ ate **before** He instituted this new Passover service. But **Jesus Christ Himself did not eat the things He commanded us to eat**. He ate the Old Testament Passover, but He did not eat the New Testament Passover Himself. Therefore these new Passover symbols cannot possibly be "the supper of the Lord" ... when "the Lord" Himself never ate them at any time.

So why would Paul just off his own bat call the New Testament Passover "the supper **of the Lord**"? Again, this implication doesn't really make any sense.

THE CONTEXT FOR THIS EXPRESSION

Now let's look at 1 Corinthians 11 itself. The context starts in verse 17 and goes right up to verse 34. Here's verse 17:

Now in this that I declare [unto you] I praise [you] not, that **you come together not for the better, but**

for the worse. (1 Corinthians 11:17)

Very clearly **Paul is addressing a problem** with the way they observed the Passover! They were doing something of which Paul strongly disapproved. The way they were observing the Passover was really bad.

Paul was writing just shortly before the Passover (1 Corinthians 5:6-8). He was trying to see that they would do things correctly at the upcoming Passover. Paul does not really imply that they were doing this every week. He was referring to the once a year Passover observance. Remember, as with all the other topics in this letter, the Corinthians knew exactly what Paul was speaking about.

In the next verse Paul briefly refers to the problem, of which problem his audience was fully aware:

For first of all, when you come together in the church, I hear that **there be divisions among you**; and I partly believe it. (1 Corinthians 11:18)

Now let's understand what Paul is addressing here.

He is not speaking about general divisions in the congregation! That is something he had already addressed in chapter 1 (1 Corinthians 1:10-13), and then fully expounded in chapter 3 (1 Corinthians 3:3-10), and also in chapter 4. At the beginning of chapter 5 Paul starts a new topic. So **his statement in 1 Corinthians 11:18 is not meant to be a repetition of what he had said before!**

In verse 18 Paul pointed out specifically that there were divisions among them **in regard to how they observed the Passover!** Can we understand this?

This means that different factions in the Corinthian Church were observing the Passover in a different manner from other people in the same congregation. This meant that some people were obviously doing some things that were wrong, since they couldn't all be right!

In the next verse Paul confirms that there were indeed **some heretical ideas about how the Passover should be kept:**

For there must be also **heresies among you**, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you. (1 Corinthians 11:19)

So notice!

Paul tells us that the way **some** people in the Corinthian congregation kept the Passover was "**heresy**"! That's how they came together "for the worse".

The question is: does Paul tell us what that heresy is or does he not tell us this? Having called it a heresy, why would he not expose it? The answer is simple: in the very next verse he proceeds to **expose the heresy!**

When you come together therefore into one place, **[this] is not to eat the lord's supper.** (1 Corinthians 11:20)

Paul is here spelling out "the heresy" that he referred to in the previous verse. So what was that heresy? The heresy was that they were eating something that they should not have been eating.

THE MISTRANSLATION

Let's look at the transliterated Greek text for this verse.

sunerchomenonoun humon epi to auto ouk estin **kuriakon** deipnon phagein (1 Corinthians 11:20)

Translated literally with the same word-order this reads:

"Coming together then (or therefore) you into it (i.e. into one place) not it is lordly a supper to eat."

Shortly I will explain why I changed "the Lord" into "lordly".

Changing the word order to comply with grammatical requirements in English we get:

"Therefore (when) you come together into one place, it is not to eat a lordly supper."

Now you are not going to find a correct English translation for this verse, because all translators approach this verse with preconceived ideas. They think this is speaking about eating certain meals that the New Testament Church supposedly commonly ate together. But that is not what Paul is referring to.

The Greek word "**kuriakos**" translated as "the Lord's" or as "of the Lord" is not a noun at all! **It is an adjective!** But in English "the Lord" is a noun. And all the translators have misunderstood what Paul is actually saying. And most people have likewise also misunderstood Paul's statement.

In NT Greek the expression for "the supper of the Lord" (or "**the Lord's supper**") would be: "**to deipnon tou kuriou**". This expression contains two Greek nouns, and the second noun is the genitive case of the Greek noun "**kurios**".

But that's not the expression we find in 1 Corinthians 11:20.

Instead, the Greek text for the relevant expression in verse 20 reads: "**kuriakon deipnon**".

First of all, the Greek text does not contain the definite article for either Greek word. So Paul was **not** speaking about "**the** supper" or "**the** Lord"! He was **only** speaking about "**a** supper". And he was not at all speaking about "the Lord"! This already has major ramifications.

Thus this verse is not speaking about "the supper of the Lord". At best it is only speaking about "a supper of the Lord". But this is still not fully correct.

So secondly, Paul used the adjective "kuriakos" and not the noun "kurios". That makes a huge difference! **Paul did not say "of the Lord"!** Paul only said "lordly", an adjective. In plain language:

Where the noun "kurios", when used with the definite article, refers to Jesus Christ, **the adjective "kuriakos"**, when used to describe "a supper", **does not refer to Jesus Christ at all!**

"Kuriakon deipnon" really means "a lordly supper"; in other words, "**a supper fit for a lord**", "**a high society supper**", "**a luxurious supper**", etc.

Once again, Paul did **not** write "to deipnon tou kuriou"! Paul did not use the Greek expression for "the Lord's supper"! **"The Lord's supper" is nothing more than a very devious and diabolical mistranslation.** It is just as devious as the mistranslation in 2 Timothy 3:16.

If we correct this mistranslation, then we find that the expression "the Lord's supper" is in fact never used in the New Testament.

So let's incorporate this correction into our translation of verse 20.

"Therefore (when) you come together into one place, it is not to eat a supper fit for a lord."

In plain English Paul was saying:

"When you come together for the Passover, you are not supposed to have a luxurious feast-style meal."

Paul was not talking about the supper "the Lord" had eaten. Paul was not calling the meal Christ had eaten "the Lord's supper". Paul was not speaking about Jesus Christ at all. Paul was speaking about the excessive meals (i.e. "lordly suppers") that some members were bringing to the Passover service.

Next, there are different words in NT Greek to express negation. Some express a qualified denial and others express an absolute denial. The word "ou" (or "ouk" before a vowel) expresses **absolute denial**. [See Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and similar reference works.] This (i.e. "ouk") is the word used here by Paul.

To paraphrase, Paul is saying in this verse:

"You people who keep the Passover in a heretical way need to understand something, and that is this: when you come together to keep the Passover, **it is absolutely not to eat a lordly feast-style meal!** That's not what I taught you!"

It is clear that Christ instituted the bread and wine of the New Testament Passover **after** the meal had been completed. This is clear from both, Luke 22:19-20 and Paul's statement a few verses later (i.e. 1 Corinthians 11:25).

Let's now see the next verse.

For in eating every one takes before [other] his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken. (1 Corinthians 11:21)

And here is the transliterated Greek text.

hekastos **gar** to idion deipnon prolambanei en to phagein kai hos men peina hos de methuei (1 Corinthians 11:21)

Translated literally, with the same word-order this reads:

"Every one for the own supper takes before in to eat and one indeed is hungry another is drunken."

The Greek word "**gar**" (translated as "**for**") at the start of this verse is of interest. It is a conjunction, joining two thoughts. In Thayer's Lexicon there are three full columns of explanation for "gar". Here is a section of this explanation:

"... it comes to pass that, by the use of this particle (i.e. "gar"), **either the reason and cause of a foregoing statement is added**, whence arises the causal or argumentative force of the particle ... **or some previous declaration is explained** ..." (page 109, Thayer's Lexicon).

In plain language: what Paul says in verse 21 **explains** and gives the reason for his statement in the previous verse! So **verse 21 explains what Paul means in verse 20**. Verse 21 explains what Paul means with the statement: when you come to the Passover it is absolutely not to eat a lordly (i.e. sumptuous) supper. Can we understand this? That is what the use of the particle "gar" at the start of verse 21 tells us.

So what was the problem in Corinth?

The problem was that some came to have "a supper"!

Some (those involved in the heresy) brought a full meal, fit for a lord, with them to the Passover service, including substantial quantities of wine. **Others came without any food** (it doesn't mean they were poor and starving ... that would have been a different issue for Paul to address) because they were coming for partaking of only the bread and the wine.

Those who practised the heresy Paul is addressing had some excuse or "justification" for bringing a feast-meal fit for a lord to the Passover service. Put yourself into the place of these people involved in this heresy: how would you have tried to justify bringing your own huge feast-meal to the Passover service? What is the justification you could possibly have used?

Here is the point we need to understand:

Where the OT Hebrew had two different words, one for "feasts" (i.e. "chag") and another for "appointed days", including Holy Days (i.e. "mow'ed"), the NT Greek language had only one word (i.e. Greek "heorte"). So in Greek "the feasts" are the same as "Holy Days" and also as "appointed days" ... all are designated as "heorte". This is discussed at length in my article "The Passover: Is it a Feast or is it Not a Feast?", available on my website.

So to some of the Greek-speaking Corinthians the Passover was "a Feast", and therefore they came to the Passover with a feast-style sumptuous meal, whose meal Paul referred to as "a lordly supper". To some of the Corinthians the Passover was no different from the feast-meals they had on Pentecost and at the Feast of Tabernacles, etc. ... it had to be celebrated with plenty of good food and good wine.

Perhaps they may even have reasoned that they were only copying the whole observance that Jesus Christ had observed ... first eating a full meal in the form of the Old Testament Passover, to then be followed by the new emblems of bread and wine.

Irrespective of any justification they may have used, "every one takes before others **his own supper**" (1 Corinthians 11:21). They were having a meal at the Passover service! That was wrong!

And therefore Paul told them that the Passover is **not** for "**eating a lordly meal**" (verse 20). This statement "a lordly meal" may perhaps sound a little awkward to some of us, because we are so conditioned by the translators translating the Greek adjective for "lordly" as if it was the Greek noun for "lord". We have been deceived. Today instead of "a lordly meal" we would more commonly say something like "a sumptuous meal fit for a king", or "a five star meal".

A supper is readily linked to "a Feast" and even to "a Holy Day", but a supper is not at all to be associated with "a Passover observance". The heresy (verse 19) Paul was confronting was that people brought a meal to the Passover service (verse 21), and Paul identified that meal as "a lordly supper".

In the next verse, verse 22, Paul proceeds to explain very clearly that people should eat such "suppers" **at home in their own houses**! We don't come to the Church of God on the Passover evening to

partake of "a supper"!

Notice:

What? have you not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise you the Church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise [you] not. (1 Corinthians 11:22)

In plain language: I praise you not for bringing "a lordly supper" to church on the Passover evening.

It should really be quite clear:

Verse 18: Paul shows they had divisions over how to keep the Passover.

Verse 19: Paul tells us that there was a heresy involved.

Verse 20: Paul identifies that heresy as eating "a lordly supper".

(Our English translations have here confused the issue by mistranslating this as "the Lord's supper".)

Verse 21: Paul spells out what the heretics actually did; they ate a meal at the Passover service.

Verse 22: Paul condemns this heresy and makes clear that "suppers" should be eaten at home.

Verse 23 onwards: Paul explains how the Passover really should be kept, totally condemning the idea of "a supper"! There is no room for "a supper" anywhere in Paul's thinking.

Thus there is no justification here for ever under any circumstances using **the heretical term** "the Lord's Supper" when we really mean the Passover.

God's people keep the Passover. The expression "the Lord's supper" isn't even in the Bible! It only appears in our translations because people have deliberately mistranslated the Greek adjective into the English noun expression "the Lord's". And Paul's instruction in verse 20 embodies an absolute denial, telling us **something we are not to do**.

So we need to **acknowledge** that the term "the Lord's Supper" is a heretical term that should never be applied to the Passover!

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