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1 CORINTHIANS 11 AND 'THE LORD'S SUPPER' EXPLAINED

Over the years many people have been confused about exactly 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 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)

To correctly understand what Paul was speaking about, we need to get the facts about what was happening in Corinth. We need to keep this account in the right perspective.

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 "(the) Lord's Supper" is used ONLY ONE TIME ... here in 1 Corinthians 11:20. It is never used anywhere else! THEREFORE it is 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 PEOPLE 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 Peter and the other apostles took part in, and which term the participants themselves never used at any time?

4) WHY would Paul refer to eating a tiny piece of bread and drinking a tiny sip of wine as "A SUPPER"? To do so would be a gross 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 11:3) ... and they also KNEW EXACTLY WHAT PAUL MEANT THE ONLY TIME HE EVER USED THE EXPRESSION "THE LORD'S SUPPER"!

7) It is quite clear, beyond any shadow of doubt, 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 AV)

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 ye, as oft as ye drink *it*, in remembrance of me. (1 Corinthians 11:25 AV)

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 WHO actually did "the eating and drinking" during this institution of the New Testament Passover? Why would it be called "THE SUPPER OF THE LORD"? Did "the Lord" actually do any eating? No, He didn't! He ate BEFORE He instituted this new service. So why would Paul just off his own bat call it "the supper OF THE LORD"? Again, this doesn't really make any sense.

THE CONTEXT OF 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 YE 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! Paul was writing just shortly before the Passover (1 Corinthians 5:6-8). He was trying to see that they would do things correctly in the upcoming Passover. He does NOT really imply that they were doing this every week. 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, which his audience was fully aware of:

For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that THERE BE DIVISIONS AMONG YOU; and I partly believe it. (1 Corinthians 11:18)

Now understand what Paul is addressing. 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 a repetition of what he had said before!

In verse 18 Paul meant 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 OBVIOUSLY were doing things that were wrong, since they couldn't all be right!

In the next verse Paul confirms that there were indeed some heretical (note!) 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 plainly that the way SOME people in the Corinthian congregation kept the Passover was "HERESY"! The question is: does he tell us what that heresy is or does he not tell us this? Having called it a heresy, why would he hide it? The answer is simple: in the very next verse he proceeds to EXPOSE THE HERESY!

When ye come together therefore into one place, [THIS] IS NOT TO EAT THE LORD'S SUPPER. (1 Corinthians 11:20)

The different Greek texts are all identical for this verse. Let's look at the transliterated Greek.

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

Translated with the same word-order this reads:

"Coming together then you into it (i.e. into one place) not it is of the Lord a supper to eat."

The word "kuriakos" is not a noun but an adjective. It is not a strictly religious term at all, but also found in inscriptions and in the papyri with the meaning of "IMPERIAL", as in "imperial finance" and in "imperial treasury". Thus, the term "kuriakon deipnon" should really be rendered as "lordly supper" or as "imperial supper". This expression in Greek is really an adjective plus a noun and NOT two nouns, as we have it in English.

This word "kuriakos" is only used twice in the N.T.: here and in Revelation 1:10, where it is used in the expression "on the Lord's day". It shows ownership or possession. So in that sense the meaning is probably most effectively conveyed by using the genitive case in English ... "the day of the Lord" and "the supper of the Lord".

There are in the New Testament different words in 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.

So Paul is saying in this verse:

"Understand something you people who practice a heresy: when you come together to keep the Passover, IT IS ABSOLUTELY NOT TO EAT A SUPPER OF THE LORD! That is not what I taught you to come together for!"

The Greek word "deipnon" (i.e. "supper") is used 16 times in the N.T., and Paul himself never used this word anywhere else! It is only here in verses 20 and 21 that this word appears in Paul's writings. And it appears in the context of addressing a heresy!

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 taketh before [other] his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken. (1 Corinthians 11:21)

And here is the 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 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 supper of the Lord. 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?

THE PROBLEM WAS THAT THEY CAME TO HAVE A "SUPPER"!

Some (those involved in the heresy!) brought a full meal 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.

Now obviously, those who practised the heresy Paul is addressing had SOME EXCUSE or "justification" for bringing a full feast-meal 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 only justification you could possibly have used? Isn't that obvious?

THE ONLY EXCUSE someone could possibly have used is to claim that they were observing it exactly as Jesus Christ did ... by first having a feast-meal like Christ did and THEN having the new Passover symbols of the unleavened bread and the wine. That "supper" they were having would have been a real supper with plenty of food and they would have called it "the Lord's Supper". Isn't that obvious?

They would have claimed to do everything the same as the Lord did that evening of His last Passover. In verse 20 Paul uses the term "the Lord's Supper" and then, in verse 21, he proceeds to describe "the supper" that those practising this heresy were having.

In the next verse, verse 22, he 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 to partake of "a supper"! Notice:

What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye 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)

Just read this section for what it actually says! Let's not read our preconceived ideas into this text! It is really 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 being called "THE LORD'S SUPPER".

Verse 21: Paul spells out what those who accepted this heresy actually did.

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 using this, according to Paul, heretical term "the Lord's Supper".

As a final point in this regard:

NOWHERE IN THE BIBLE IS THERE A POSITIVE INSTRUCTION TO "KEEP THE LORD'S SUPPER"! IT JUST ISN'T THERE! AND NOWHERE IS THE PASSOVER ACTUALLY CALLED "THE LORD'S SUPPER"!

The only reference with this term that we find is one which is prefaced by an absolute denial! And it is BY INFERENCE from this denial that people have REASONED that THEREFORE the name "Passover" should be replaced by the name "Lord's Supper". The expression "Lord's Supper" is NEVER once used in a positive context! It is ONLY used in this negative context! It was to be expected that the religions of this world and their god (see 2 Corinthians 11:14-15) would latch onto such a term.

To paraphrase 1 Corinthians 14:37 very freely: if you think you have God's Spirit and understand the truth of God, THEN ACKNOWLEDGE that the term "the Lord's Supper" is a heretical term that should never be applied to the Passover!

A MISREPRESENTATION

In order to support the wrong way to observe the Passover, some people have appealed to the NIV translation of this passage. The NIV text of 1 Corinthians 11:25 reads:

In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, WHENEVER you drink it, in remembrance of me." (1 Corinthians 11:25 NIV)

Based on this translation, some people have claimed:

"... 'WHEN' could indicate a set time, but 'WHENEVER' (reflecting the Greek conditional particle 'ean') indicates flexibility."

HOWEVER, THIS IS A MISREPRESENTATION OF THE FACTS!

Here is the transliterated Greek text of this verse, the Received Text:

osautos kai to poterion meta to deipnesai legon touto to poterion he kaine diatheke estin en to emo haimati touto poieite hosakis an pinete eis ten emen anamnesin (1 Corinthians 11:25)

And here is the Alexandrian Text of the NIV:

osautos kai to poterion meta to deipnesai legon touto to poterion he kaine diatheke estin en to emo haimati touto poieite hosakis ean pinete eis ten emen anamnesin (1 Corinthians 11:25 N26)

A careful comparison will show that these two texts are identical except for one single letter. Where the Received Text (i.e. used by the KJV) has the word "an", the Alexandrian Text (used by the NIV) has the word "ean". This is the word which some people have based their reasoning on.

So notice the following things:

- 1) The word "WHENEVER" in the NIV is a translation of the TWO Greek words "HOSAKIS EAN". It is NOT a translation of the word "ean" only! This is overlooked in the fallacious reasoning presented above.
- 2) The words "AS OFT AS" in the KJV are a translation of the TWO Greek words "HOSAKIS AN".
- 3) So we are in fact dealing with 3 different Greek words: "hosakis", "an" and "ean". Let's look at each of them carefully.

4) Let's first look at the primary particle "an".

We don't really have an accurate equivalent in English for this word. In Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon it is described as follows:

"a particle INDICATING THAT SOMETHING CAN OR SHOULD OCCUR ON CERTAIN CONDITIONS, OR BY THE COMBINATION OF CERTAIN FORTUITOUS CAUSES. In Latin it has no equivalent, nor do the English words "HAPLY, PERCHANCE" exactly and everywhere correspond to it."

It is never used when something is definite and unconditional. It is a word that conveys that SOMETHING IS CONDITIONAL.

In the New Testament this particle is used 191 times in 173 different verses. In the KJV text it is only translated 80 times. 111 times the translators left it out in English because it would be quite verbose to accurately convey its meaning, without actually adding very much.

5) Next, let's look at the conditional particle "ean". Thayer's Lexicon describes it as follows:

"a CONDITIONAL particle which makes reference to time and to experience, introducing something future, but not determining, before the event, whether it is certainly to take place."
(page 162)

In the Received Text it is used 334 times. It is most often translated as "IF, WHETHER".

6) Now that we have seen the two particles that are involved (i.e. "an" and "ean"), let's look at the dominant word in this expression. That is the word "hosakis".

"Hosakis" is a relative adverb and it means "AS OFTEN AS". It is only used 3 times in the N.T.; twice here in verses 25 and 26 and also in Revelation 11:6. Now in both verses in 1 Corinthians 11 it is used in conjunction with the particle "an", showing that those two verses refer to something that is CONDITIONAL! But in Revelation 11:6 it is used with the particle "ean". Let's notice that usage:

These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy: and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, AS OFTEN AS they will. (Revelation 11:6)

The expression "as often as" is a translation of the two Greek words "hosakis ean".

7) So here are the facts about 1 Corinthians 11:25 :

A) The words "AS OFT AS" in the KJV and the word "WHENEVER" in the NIV are a translation of the Greek word "HOSAKIS". Even without either particle present "hosakis" would be correctly translated as "as oft as". That is what this word means!

B) The Greek particle has really been left untranslated in the English text. The correct Greek particle here is "an", found in the 95% of MSS and the corruption is "ean", found in some of the remaining 5% Alexandrian Minority MSS. But that is only a minor point.

C) "Whenever" in the NIV is certainly not a translation of the particle "ean", as some people have claimed. Any lexicon will bear this out.

D) The real point to notice here is this: The use of the Greek particle "an" in the correct text ADDS CERTAIN CONDITIONS TO "AS OFT AS"! That is important to understand!

And that is not conveyed correctly in either the KJV or the NIV! It is difficult to correctly convey the Greek "an" into English!

E) Without either particle present, the last part of this verse would read: "... this do you as often as you drink it in the remembrance of me". By adding the particle "an", Christ was ADDING CERTAIN CONDITIONS! See again Thayer's definition of this Greek word "an" on the previous page. The word "an" means that:

"something COULD occur ON CERTAIN CONDITIONS"!

F) So the Greek "an" doesn't make it more flexible at all! Instead it makes it more restrictive than the English translation implies, by adding implied conditions!

G) Now even if the Alexandrian Text was the correct text, the particle "ean" is also a CONDITIONAL particle! "Conditional" means that there are CONDITIONS for doing this! And those conditions are clearly implied in Paul's account! Paul knew his readers were familiar with those conditions, which he himself had taught them previously.

There are TWO conditions implied in this account:

- we are to do exactly WHAT Christ did
- we are to do it exactly WHEN Christ did it.

That is why Paul is so specific in this chapter about WHAT Christ did and WHEN He did it! At the time Paul was writing these verses, the Passover was just ahead and the Corinthians were OBVIOUSLY preparing to keep the Passover at the correct time!

So claims that the particle "ean" (the correct MSS have the particle "an") "indicate flexibility" in how often we can have a Passover service every year are totally untrue! This Greek particle actually does the exact opposite ... it adds conditions to how and when we may observe the Passover.

And it should be quite clear that God does not want us to refer to the Passover as "the Lord's Supper". Paul exposes this term to be "the heresy" he refers to in 1 Corinthians 11:19.

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