

"I Received Of The Lord ..."

"For I received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you that the Lord Jesus in the night in which he was betrayed, took bread ..." (1 Cor. 11:23).

These words serve as introduction to perhaps the earliest account of the institution of the Supper of Christ. One might naturally assume (although not necessarily correct) that Matthew and Mark's account of this solemn event were written before Paul's account. Yet many scholars believe Paul's account actually preceded both Matthew's and Mark's account. The first Corinthian letter was written approximately A.D. 57 and some scholars place Matthew's about A.D. 63; Mark's A.D. 56-65 or 65. It is generally agreed that Luke's account of our Lord's life was written during the two years Paul was in prison in Caesarea, thus later than the account in 1 Corinthians. It is not really of material importance whether Matthew, Mark, Paul, or Luke wrote first. They agree that our Lord instituted a Supper to be done in His memory. One thing is striking: the account of the celebration of the Lord's Supper written by Luke is very similar that of Paul's. In fact, Luke 22:24 is almost identical to 1 Corinthians 11:23, a fact not surprising given the close association of Paul and Luke.

The Lord's Supper was observed from the church's beginning for Acts 2:42 records these words: *"and they continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine, in the fellowship and breaking of bread and the prayers."* It was also part of the worship among Gentile churches, witnessed here in Corinth, then later when Paul and his company were with disciples in Troas when they *"came together to break bread"* (Acts 20:7).

No major doctrine of Christ is left unscathed by doctrines of men and the Lord's Supper is no exception. One ancient error relating to the Lord's Supper is the doctrine of "transubstantiation". Because Jesus, when He took the bread, said, *"Take eat, this is my body,"* Catholics conclude that the bread, when blessed by the priest, becomes literally the body of Christ. However, such was simply a figure of speech called a metaphor. "A metaphor is a figure of speech in which one thing is said to be another thing" and this is illustrated by Paul's account. Having recorded our Lord's words, *"This is my body,"* in vs. 24; he then proceeds to say, *"For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink the cup, ye proclaim the Lord's death till he come"* (1 Cor. 11:26).

Neither have brethren been immune from reaching erroneous conclusions. For the past 125 years or more, the church has been troubled by some who seize upon Jesus' words, *"This cup is the New Covenant in my blood; drink*

ye all of it," concluding that Jesus' command to all drink of the cup was a command that all drink from the same container. These brethren fail to realize Jesus was using another figure of speech called metonym, the naming of one thing to suggest another. Jesus named the container to suggest the contents and by comparing the various accounts of the Lord's words it becomes evident that the "cup" is the "fruit of the vine." It is a symbol of His blood which He poured out that our sins might be remitted. He commanded that the cup was to be taken and "divided among you" (Lk. 22:17); something we can do with what is in the container, but not with the container itself. Moreover, we are reminded that we "drink the cup" (1 Cor. 11:26) -- again, if it is the contents of the container we can easily do that, but we do not drink the literal container. Furthermore, it is the fruit of the vine that is the New Covenant in Christ's blood, not the vessel which held the fruit of the vine (Mt. 26:28).

It is evident God's people are commanded to partake the Supper. The very words, "*this do in remembrance of me*" (1 Cor. 11:24), is a commandment. Still, while partaking the supper is commanded, there is no written command for either when nor how often we are to keep this feast. Some see the words "*as often as ye eat this bread*" to imply that the "how often" the Supper is observed is left to the judgment of Christians. If no specific time and frequency was indicated by God, it is the only feast God gave in which the time and frequency was left up to discretion of man! The Passover, Pentecost, the day of atonement, and the feast of tabernacles are familiar events among the Jews. In regard to these feasts, Israel was not only instructed how to celebrate these feasts but how often and when they were to do so. Admittedly there are no such details spelled out for keeping the Supper.

So, are Christians left to determine for themselves when they will keep what Christ commanded them to do? We do not believe so. The Lord's Supper was part of Christians' worship from the very beginning as has already been seen. The supper was something early Christians remained steadfast in observing in every church, whether Jerusalem, Corinth, or Troas. Some instructions touching communion were given to the disciples and we can discern, by their actions, what those instructions were. They met on the week's first day (Acts 20:7). Furthermore, the Corinthians were coming together to break bread and their assembly was on the week's first day (1 Cor. 11:20; 16:1-2). We see therefore, by the examples of early disciples, that they met each week, on its first day, to do what their Lord commanded them to do: "*This do, in remembrance of me.*" We follow their example.

-- Jim McDonald