

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Till He Come

For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. (1 Corinthians 11:26, KJV 1900)

Much of the typical discussion regarding Communion examines the elements used in the observance. Do you use wine, or is grape juice or even a cheap imitation grape soda acceptable? Do you use "unleavened" bread, or is a loaf of Wonder Bread just as fitting? I suggest that the symbolism consistently associated with Communion in the New Testament requires that the elements used are important to teach the lesson intended by the service. In the New Testament, those elements are consistently described as wine; yes real wine, and unleavened bread, bread made with no yeast. Occasionally the frequency of the observance is questioned. Here there is no specific Scripture to indicate that a church should observe Communion on any specific frequency. It is my view that "breaking of bread," as in Acts 2:46, refers to Communion. It could refer to a simple meal, but the context of the passage, I believe, favors Communion. "...with such an one no not to eat" (1 Corinthians 5:11) likewise seems in context to refer to Communion, not to a common meal. Clearly, Paul's "as oft as ye..." in our study context does not demand a certain frequency for Communion. We should observe it sufficiently often to keep the truth of its symbols and the lessons they teach clearly imbedded in our minds. Although we follow the original pattern in Scripture, Communion and washing the saints' feet at the same time, we should keep the two observances distinct in our minds. One observance focuses exclusively on Jesus and His death for our sins. The other action focuses just as emphatically on our Biblical obligation to serve each other. A person who believes that Jesus' death plus anything that he does is necessary for eternal salvation, beginning in his personal experience of the new birth, can't fully take the elements of Communion "worthily," rightly "discerning the Lord's body" plus nothing else. And a person whose heart and attitude are aimed at his brother's or sister's throat or back (Scripture uses analogies that dramatically expose the act, "backbiting" and "gnashing on him with their teeth") cannot rightly practice washing the saints' feet. If we are to rightly discern the Lord's body in Communion, we must enter the service believing wholly in what He has done for us to impart the new birth to us and to preserve us to His eternal glory. If we are to rightly engage in washing the saints' feet, as Jesus described and commanded it in John 13,

we must enter into the service with a profound and pervasive sense of our own unworthiness, and equally deep love and respect for our brothers and sisters in the church, and a lifestyle that consistently labors to serve them, not lord ourselves and our ways over them. The two observances do not make up Communion. They make up two distinct services, Communion and washing the saints' feet.

2 Peter 1:20 in context refers to the giving of Scripture through the holy men whom the Lord chose to write His words in His Book. The Bible is His Book, written by some thirty to forty or so men over more than fifteen centuries. Not once did He allow those men to write their own "private interpretations" of the way they thought things should be. If God so clearly forbade private interpretations in the men who wrote His Book, we should enter into our study of His Book with an equally strong conviction that He will no more accept our private interpretation than He did theirs. More often than one might imagine, a believer will confuse what Scripture actually teaches with what he believes it teaches, his own "Private interpretation," and will impute into his own ideas and private interpretations equal weight as the words of Scripture, something of a personal version of Roman Catholic "ex cathedra," the pope's alleged infallibility in what he "speaks" or says in his official teachings.

This presumption of infallibility contradicts both lessons, of Communion and of washing the saints' feet. Both are to be observed in the setting of a community of believers, not as private individual believers. Every appearance of these two events in the New Testament was a public and community observance.

While the New Testament teaches the priesthood of every believer, it also teaches an essential community of believers. One believer alone should never trust his personal interpretations and opinions above all other believers. Scripture teaches that the Lord has endowed His church, not one elite, at least in his own eyes, believer, to be His vehicle for the maintenance, preservation, and spreading of His truth. (1 Timothy 3:15) No individual believer, be he preacher, deacon, or member, should become so self-consumed as to think that he and his ideas are God's official and exclusive insight into His truth. In this quest for authoritative truth, can a church be wrong? Indeed

they may. However, the fact that flawed and frail humans may err does not negate the emphatic statement of this passage. In this broken, flawed, sin-cursed world in which we live, the Lord gave His people the very best vehicle possible to keep them informed and directed to Him and to His truth. That vehicle is not the self-proclaimed prophet or would-be spiritual despot. **It is the Lord's church.** Never do we read in the New Testament that any individual believer is ever elevated by the Lord to be His "pillar and ground of the truth." I've known a few folks who attempted to play that role, and, no surprise, every such incident always resulted in chaos, spiritual schism, and degeneration, never in edification and the spiritual growth of the church. In His church, the Lord has established the safest possible vehicle for His people to know and to maintain their faith in Him and in His truth. While individual believers, however sincere and well-meaning, are liable to err in their beliefs and conduct, a respectful union of like-minded believers who wholeheartedly give themselves to the Lord and to each other, often graciously corrects and refines the stumbles of individual believers and collectively encourages each other in the right way. (1 Corinthians 4:6; 16:15; 2 Corinthians 8:5 and context; Galatians 6:1-5) This truth is powerfully emphasized in the New Testament's use of "Communion," a word that describes sharing. When a believer adopts any idea or attitude that promotes his private faith, not humbly participating in the common faith of the church, the Lord's declared "Pillar and ground of the truth," he loses the spirit of Communion that the Lord teaches in this His stated role for His church.

That Communion is intended by Scripture to be a church ordinance, not simply a common act of fellowship among individual Christians, appears in several references to the service. In 1 Corinthians 5, one of the New Testament's most despised and rejected whole chapters, Paul directly associates church membership, church discipline, and Communion together. "...with such an one no not to eat" in context refers to verses 5-8 and observance of Communion, not to sitting down with an erring believer for a common meal. In the context of our study passage, 1 Corinthians 11, several similar points are made; 1) Verse 18, "...when ye come together in the church," 2) Verse 20, "When ye come together therefore into one place," 3) Verses 27-28, eating and drinking, taking the physical elements of the Communion, "unworthily," refers to our belief about Jesus and what He did, not to any kind of self-assessment that we are so righteous as to deserve Communion, 4) throughout the lesson, Paul uses the second person pronoun plural (In the King James vernacular of the English language, in perfect harmony with the distinction made in first century Greek language's different words to reveal singular and plural second person pronouns). All of these references refer us to the collective body of

the Corinthian Church, not to individual believers at Corinth.

The weight of this lesson on the Second Coming should be obvious, "...till he come." Someone whose beliefs do not include a solid belief in the Second Coming cannot enter into Communion and participate with honest conviction, for he does not believe the Lord will return. Likewise, a believer who, like the folks in the Corinthian Church, denies the resurrection, Chapter 15, could not take Communion rightly, for they do not believe that He shall return.

Often in Scripture, God gives us mounds of information in the simple points. We need not be a theologian to understand Scripture. "...till he come." How powerful these three simple words. Think about Paul's teaching here. If someone accepts the historical fact of a man named Jesus who lived in Judah in the first century, but does not also believe that He was God manifest in the flesh or that, though He died at the hands of wicked men, He also literally arose from the dead and now lives, why take Communion to remember or to honor that Jesus? Communion, as taught in the New Testament, only makes logical sense for those who believe that He is God Incarnate, God manifest in human flesh, who died **and** arose from the dead, ascended back to heaven, and now sits on heaven's throne with the Father. (Revelation 3:21)

We show His death by taking the two items of Communion separately. Blood separated from the body depicts a dead body. We show His death in Communion because we believe that He lives. He only briefly occupied Joseph's tomb, but Scripture's powerful testimony teaches us that He arose as literally as He died, that He appeared to the disciples over a period of approximately forty days, and that He ascended in that literal resurrected body back into heaven in victorious glory. Our Communion shows our belief in this truth. Though we do not know when He shall return, we live in the constant and joyful belief that He shall surely do so. Until He does come back, we are to regularly, sincerely, and faithfully continue this precious act of service and worship, "...till he come."

"...till he come" also underscores our firm belief that He shall return, that His promises of return, resurrection, and eternal glory for His beloved children, is real. It gives us reason to joyfully celebrate this truth until that glorious day dawns.

A right mindset about Communion and feet washing should overflow so as to permeate our every act of worship toward Him and service toward each other in our daily conduct. No less in life than in the associated celebration of these two events, our worship of God in Scripture strongly associates with our respect and service to each other. Jesus made that point in the lesson that He taught after washing the disciples' feet (John 13), and First John repeatedly emphasizes the same truth. I seek to show His death till He comes. May I serve you now?

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor