

## COMING TO THE LORD'S TABLE

The Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread, and having given thanks, He broke it and said, This is My body, which is given for you; this do unto the remembrance of Me. Similarly also the cup after they had dined, saying, This cup is the new covenant established in My blood; this do, as often as you drink it, unto the remembrance of Me. For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you declare the Lord's death until He comes. (1 Cor. 11:23b-26)

The Lord Himself instituted His table as a declaration of His death and resurrection through which He has become our life and life supply and has made us members of His Body (1 Cor. 11:26; Col. 3:4; John 6:57; Eph. 5:30). It is also a weekly reminder of our most basic need—to receive the person and work of Christ, as symbolized by the bread and wine on the table. To be able to participate in the Lord's table is a great privilege, but it is not without conditions, as Paul wrote:

So then whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and of the blood of the Lord. But let a man prove himself, and in this way let him eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself if he does not discern the body. (1 Cor. 11:27-29)

To understand Paul's warning, we must answer three questions: What is it to eat the bread or drink the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner? What is it to prove oneself? What is it to discern the body?

When we see the word *unworthy*, our immediate reaction may be that we are unworthy, that we have shortcomings in our living and our service to the Lord, but that, although true, is not what is meant here. Watchman Nee gave us the meaning of the word *unworthy* here, saying, "The most important thing to remember when we come to the table is to be counted worthy. This does not refer to whether or not the person is worthy but whether or not his attitude is worthy" (*The Collected Works of Watchman Nee [CWWN], Vol. 48: Messages for Building Up New Believers (1)*, 271; see also *Life-study of 1 Corinthians*, 485). Therefore, to take the table in an unworthy manner is not a matter of the worthiness of our person before the Lord but of how we approach partaking of His table.

It is concerning the manner in which we come to partake of the Lord's table that a man must "prove himself." Such proving is not to introspect concerning our spiritual condition. Brother Nee wrote, "The proving in this verse is not an examination which Christians have in the pursuit of holiness; rather, it speaks of coming before the Lord to eat the bread and drink the cup" (*CWWN, Vol. 9: The Present Testimony (2)*, 219). He added, "Self-examination in this verse concerns whether or not we come to the Lord's table to remember the Lord. It does not ask us to turn inward to search for wrongs so that we can pursue after spiritual progress" (219). Thus, proving one's self is a matter of examining our realization of and attitude toward what the Lord's table represents.

What, then, makes one unworthy to partake of the Lord's table? It is to not discern the Lord's body. The bread on the table is a symbol with a twofold significance. It signifies the Lord's physical body which was broken for us on the cross so that He could impart Himself into us as the bread of life (John 6:35, 48). It also points to the Lord's mystical Body, comprised of all those who have partaken of Christ and have entered into the unique fellowship of Christ, which is the fellowship in which every member of the Body of Christ participates (1 Cor. 10:16-17; 1:9).

Paul chastised the saints in Corinth because many took the Lord's table in a light and loose way and without regard for one another (10:20-22). On the one hand, they did not honor the One who had sacrificed Himself for them; they treated His table as common. On the other hand, they dishonored their fellow members in the Body. If we consider the whole of this epistle we can see that underlying the turmoils in the church in Corinth—such as divisions, immorality, and legal disputes (11:18; 5:1; 6:6)—was a lack of mutual care. Even their spiritual seeking was self-centered (14:4, 12). This is why chapters 12 through 14 speak of the Body being blended together so that the members would have the same care for one another (12:24-25), of love being the most excellent way (12:31—13:13), and of building up one another (14:3-5, 12, 26).

Often when we speak of discerning the body in relation to the Lord's table, we mean that we must discern that the bread we partake of represents the fellowship of the entire Body of Christ and not that of a sect. However, we also have to realize that we may be in a genuine local church and still be divisive ourselves. Brother Lee taught us that in coming to the Lord's table we need to keep two words in mind—remembrance (11:24) and fellowship (10:16). We remember the Lord and have fellowship with one another (*Experiencing Christ as the Inner Life*, 47-49). To discern the body means that we take care of both aspects. Thus, Brother Lee told us:

You also must examine whether you are sectarian. If you have a problem with any of the saints, you should not partake of the Lord's table until you thoroughly deal with it. The context of those verses shows that we must beware of any divisiveness. If the table is divisive in its testimony, or if you yourself are divisive in your relationship to the saints, you must not partake. When there is no division—that is, when the table is the table of oneness and when you have no problem with any member of the Body—you are free to partake. (*Life Messages, Vol. 1, 309-310*)

We must remember that any saint we have a problem with is one for whom Christ died, one whom Christ purchased to Himself, even as we are. Just as Christ has received him, so also we must receive him (Rom. 15:7). We cannot be selective.

First Corinthians 11:29 speaks of discerning the body, which implies that we need to realize that the bread at the Lord's table signifies the entire Body of Christ. To touch the one loaf while we have a problem, even inwardly, with another member is to fail to discern the Body. In order to discern the Body, we must either put aside our inward problems with others or refrain from taking the bread. Otherwise, our participating in the loaf is a false performance, for we are not actually one. (*CWWL, 1978, Vol. 2, 97*)

If we take the loaf when we have a problem with a brother, we are not discerning the Body. This should be a clear warning to all of us. If we criticize a brother and then partake of the bread, we are not discerning the Body. If we discern the Body, we will first clear up the situation with the brother. If the criticism was only in our thoughts, we may confess our sin to the Lord and ask Him to cover, forgive, and cleanse us. When we come to the Lord's table, we must come in a condition of having no problems with other members of the Body. This is what it means to discern the Body. (*CWWL, 1977, Vol. 2, 65*)

Dealing with problems between brothers is not a small matter, as evidenced by the Lord's speaking in the Gospel of Matthew, a book on the kingdom. Matthew 5:23-24 says, "Therefore if you are offering your gift at the altar and there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar, and first go and be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift." Our offering to God cannot be accepted as long as we are conscious of having a problem with another brother. Moreover, in Matthew 18:23-35 the Lord told a parable of a king who desired to settle accounts with his slaves. One slave, whom the master forgave a debt of ten thousand talents, went and choked a fellow slave who owed him one hundred denarii. The master then asked him, "Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave even as I had mercy on you?" He then ordered the unforgiving slave to be punished. The Lord concluded the parable, saying, "So also will My heavenly Father do to you if each of you does not forgive his brother from your hearts" (v. 35). This shows the seriousness of harboring offenses against fellow believers. On the one hand, we must seek forgiveness from those whom we have offended. On the other hand, we must forgive others from the heart.

Seeking and exercising forgiveness are especially needful in a church that has experienced turmoil, because in turmoils there are many opportunities for offenses to occur. In such circumstances we need to come to the Lord, open to Him without reservation, and obey His inward leading absolutely. Although only the Lord can heal situations in which offenses abound, our cooperation through confessing and repenting to Him and to those we have offended, forgiving those who have offended us, and seeking reconciliation with our fellow members give Him the ground to do so.

Romans 12:18 gives us an important balancing word. It says, "If possible, as far as it depends on you, live in peace with all men." Brother Lee explained:

We need to live in peace with others, as far as it depends on us to do so. Sometimes it is not possible to live in peace with all men, because others are not willing to have a life of peace. There is nothing we can do in such a situation. This is the reason Paul says that we should live in peace with all men "if possible." As far as it depends on us, we should do our best to live in peace with everyone. (*Truth Lessons, Level 4, Vol. 3, 84*)

The Lord's table should remind us week by week of our need to keep the oneness. Keeping the oneness is vital to the Lord's blessing on His recovery. The anointing, the Lord's grace as the dew, and the commanded blessing of life are all dependent on the oneness (Psa. 133). The building up of the Body through the mutual supply in love in Ephesians 4:16 depends on keeping the oneness in verse 3. Week by week we should honor the Lord at His table by discerning the body, both in our remembrance of Him, the Head, and in caring for the church, His Body, comprised of all the saints, as the issue of His work. If the saints in His recovery would pay close attention to this matter and practice it diligently, our enjoyment of the Lord in His table and in the church life would be greatly uplifted and His building work among us would be greatly advanced. May the Lord take us on in this way.