

EATING AND DRINKING WORTHILY

“Consequently **whoever eats the loaf or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will be guilty respecting the body and the blood of the Lord.** First let a man approve himself after scrutiny, and thus let him eat of the loaf and drink of the cup. For he that eats and drinks eats and drinks judgment against himself if he does not discern the body.” – *1 Corinthians 11:27-29*

Because of the above scriptures, many Jehovah’s Witnesses are fearful of wrongly partaking at the Lord’s Evening Meal. They are taught that only 144,000 Christians throughout history are sons of God and therefore worthy to partake of the memorial emblems – the bread and wine or the loaf and the cup – and that the rest of mankind only serve as spectators and third party beneficiaries. Thus, these brothers believe if they partake thinking that they are part of the 144,000 and they are mistaken, they will suffer judgment.

This understanding (or rather misunderstanding) is a major reason why many of our brothers have failed to stand up for the Christ at past Memorial suppers. Therefore, let us take a closer look at these scriptures and their context to discern their true meaning. Hopefully, if we can dispel this error in thinking, many more in our fellowship will have the faith and the courage to stand up as sons of the Kingdom at this year’s Memorial supper.

A fundamental part of the Governing Body’s teaching about Memorial partakers is the assumption that the Christian Greek Scriptures were written only to the 144,000 anointed sons of God. All others – the friends of God – benefit from the scriptures only ‘by extension.’ Based on this assumption, one would have to conclude that the persons Paul was writing to were all members of the 144,000, who all had the heavenly hope. If so, **no member of the Corinthians congregation** could have scrutinized themselves and concluded that they were **not** sons of God with the heavenly hope.

Think about that for a moment. At that time in Christian history, there was not even the idea that **followers of Christ** should seek to live forever on the earth. The pursuit of an earthly paradise-like future was the old Jewish hope. Christ came with a new hope – entrance into the Kingdom of the Heavens:

“Happy are those conscious of their spiritual need, since the **kingdom of the heavens belongs to them.** . . . Happy are the pure in heart, since **they will see God.** Happy are the peaceable, since **they will be called ‘sons of God.’** Happy are those who have been persecuted for righteousness’ sake, since **the kingdom of the heavens belongs to them.** Happy are you when people reproach you and persecute you and lyingly say every sort of wicked thing against you for my sake. Rejoice and leap for joy, since **your reward is great in the heavens;** for in that way they persecuted the prophets prior to you.” – *Matthew 5:3, 8-11*

This distinction was made clear by Paul when writing to the Galatians. He explained the difference as a symbolic drama of those under the old Jewish covenant who were pursuing earthly things, and those under the new Christian covenant who belong to ‘Jerusalem above:’

“Tell me, **you who want to be under law**, Do you not hear the Law? For example, it is written that Abraham acquired two sons, one by the servant girl and one by the free woman; but the one by the servant girl was actually born in the manner of flesh, the other by the free woman through a promise. **These things stand as a symbolic drama; for these [women] mean two covenants**, the one from Mount Sinai, which brings forth children for slavery, and which is Hagar. Now this Hagar means Sinai, a mountain in Arabia, and she corresponds with the Jerusalem today, for she is in slavery with her children. But the **Jerusalem above** is free, and **she is our mother.**” – *Galatians 4:21-26*

So, either one was under the law or one was pursuing ‘Jerusalem above.’ There is no other option. There was no middle ground where one could be a Christian, yet pursue the things ‘under law’ – earthly Jerusalem or **Jerusalem below** – in the manner of the flesh.

In our modern day, even the Governing Body teaches that the so-called earthly hope was not revealed to Christianity until late in the 19th century. [See **Proving Ourselves Worthy of the Christ.**] Therefore, every single Christian to whom Paul was writing was pursuing everlasting **life in the heavens:**

“As for us, **our citizenship exists in the heavens**, from which place also we are eagerly waiting for a savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will refashion our humiliated body to be conformed to his glorious body according to the operation of the power that he has, even to subject all things to himself.” – *Philippians 3:20-21*

“We thank God the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ always when we pray for you, since we heard of your faith in connection with Christ Jesus and the love you have for all the holy ones **because of the hope that is being reserved for you in the heavens.** This [hope] you heard of before by telling of the truth of that good news which has presented itself to you, even as it is bearing fruit and increasing in all the world just as [it is doing] also among you, from the day you heard and accurately knew the undeserved kindness of God in truth.” – *Colossians 1:3-6*

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for according to his great mercy he gave us a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an incorruptible and undefiled and unfading inheritance. **It is reserved in the heavens for you**, who are being safeguarded by God’s power through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last period of time.” – *1 Peter 1:3-5*

In fact, any Christian who was pursuing things of the earth was viewed as having a poorly adjusted mental state:

“I am pursuing down toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God by means of Christ Jesus. Let us, then, as many of us as are mature, be of this mental attitude; and if you are mentally inclined otherwise in any respect, God will reveal the above [attitude] to you.” – *Philippians 3:14-15*

It bears pointing out that this scripture is in stark contrast to the *August 15, 2011 Watchtower, Questions from Readers*. In that Watchtower article, the Governing Body, who is apparently the source of the material, attempted to explain why some Christians might erroneously be pursuing the heavenly hope. It states:

“A number of factors including past religious beliefs, or even mental or emotional unbalance might cause some to assume mistakenly that they have the heavenly calling.”

However, according to his letter to the Philippians, Paul considered those **who were not** pursuing the heavenly hope as mentally unbalanced!

By the way, the teaching that the Christian scriptures were written only to 144,000 is inaccurate. See **Question and Response, July 29, 2012** where this misconception is corrected.

Based on all of these facts, Paul could not have meant for the Corinthian brothers to think soberly of whether they had the hope of living forever on earth or in heaven before they partook. It simply was not a part of the Christian conversation. This fact alone shows that Paul was not saying that those who partake who do not have the heavenly hope will be judged, for **all** in Paul’s day had the heavenly hope.

So since Paul was not asking the brothers to figure out whether they had the heavenly or the earthly hope, what was he suggesting? Consider the contextual verses:

“Therefore, when you come together to one place, it is not possible to eat the Lord’s evening meal. For, when you eat [it], each one takes his own evening meal beforehand, so that one is hungry but another is intoxicated. Certainly you do have houses for eating and drinking, do you not? Or do you despise the congregation of God and make those who have nothing ashamed? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you? In this I do not commend you.” – *1 Corinthians 11:20-22*

Paul was telling the brothers that they were not united, nor were they respecting one another’s circumstances. Some had eaten their own meals before they met together, and were even intoxicated. Whereas, others who did not have the means to have a large meal with wine arrived at the meeting hoping to share a meal. As a result, some were eating the Lord’s designated meal together, and some were not. Paul continues:

“For I received from the Lord that which I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which he was going to be handed over took a loaf and, after giving thanks, he broke it and said: **‘This means my body which is in your behalf.** Keep doing this in remembrance of me.’ He did likewise respecting the cup also, after he had the evening meal, saying: **‘This cup means the new covenant by virtue of my blood.** Keep doing this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.’ For as often as you eat this loaf and drink this cup, you keep proclaiming the death of the Lord, until he arrives.” – *1 Corinthians 11:23-26*

Here, Paul reminded the brothers of the significance of the ‘loaf’ and the ‘cup’ as explained by Jesus himself. The loaf represents Jesus’ body which is the bread of life that is ‘given in our behalf’ – the living word of truth incarnated in mortal flesh.

“Jesus said to them: **‘I am the bread of life.** He that comes to me will not get hungry at all, and he that exercises faith in me will never get thirsty at all.’ . . . **‘I am the bread of life.** Your forefathers ate the manna in the wilderness and yet died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that anyone may eat of it and not die. **I am the living bread that came down from heaven;** if anyone eats of this bread he will live forever; and, for a fact, **the bread that I shall give is my flesh in behalf of the life of the world.**” – *John 6:35, 48-51*

The cup represents the new covenant where the law of the Father is written in our hearts by means of the ministry of the Spirit of Truth which was poured out on our behalf.

“For this is the **covenant** that I shall conclude with the house of Israel after those days,’ is the utterance of Jehovah. **‘I will put my law within them, and in their heart I shall write it.** And I will become their God, and they themselves will become my people.” – *Jeremiah 31:33*

“I have many things yet to say to you, but you are not able to bear them at present. However, when that one arrives, **the spirit of the truth, he will guide you into all the truth,** for he will not speak of his own impulse, but what things he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things coming. That one will glorify me, because he will receive from what is mine and will declare it to you.” – *John 16:12-14*

“And in the last days,’ God says, **‘I shall pour out some of my spirit upon every sort of flesh,** and your sons and your daughters will prophesy and your young men will see visions and your old men will dream dreams; and even upon my men slaves and upon my women slaves I will pour out some of my spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.” – *Acts 2:17-18*

“And not only that, but let us exult while in tribulations, since we know that tribulation produces endurance; endurance, in turn, an approved condition; the approved condition, in turn, hope, and the hope does not lead to disappointment; because **the love of God has been poured out into our hearts through the holy spirit, which was given us.**” – *Romans 5:3-5*

And as often as the brothers met together and partook of the Memorial supper, they would be reminded of the life of Jesus and the ministry of the Spirit of Truth in their hearts.

Given its tremendous significance, it would be judgment-worthy to esteem the loaf and the cup as of ordinary value by showing up already full and intoxicated.

“Any man that has disregarded the law of Moses dies without compassion, upon the testimony of two or three. Of how much more severe a punishment, do you think, will the man be counted worthy **who has trampled upon the Son of God and who has esteemed as of ordinary value the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified, and who has outraged the spirit of undeserved kindness with contempt?**” – *Hebrews 10:28-29*

Paul continues:

“Consequently whoever eats the loaf or drinks the cup of the Lord unworthily will be guilty respecting the body and the blood of the Lord. First let a man approve himself **after scrutiny**, and thus let him eat of the loaf and drink of the cup. For he that eats and drinks eats and drinks judgment against himself **if he does not discern the body.**” – *1 Corinthians 11:27-29*

The unworthiness arises when we have the wrong frame of mind. Therefore, Paul counseled them to scrutinize themselves and make sure that they are sober and serious about the occasion, and not gathering together for social merriment. He continues:

“That is why many among you are weak and sickly, and quite a few are sleeping [in death]. But if we would discern what we ourselves are, we would not be judged. However, when we are judged, we are disciplined by Jehovah, that we may not become condemned with the world. Consequently, my brothers, **when you come together to eat [it], wait for one another.** If anyone is hungry, let him eat at home, that you may not come together for judgment. But the remaining matters I will set in order when I get there.”
– *1 Corinthians 11:30-34*

Paul suggested that the overindulgence of some is why they were ‘weak and sickly’ and why some had died, apparently prematurely. He wanted the brothers to ‘discern who they are’ – sons of God, brothers of Christ and heirs to the Kingdom of the Heavens. (*Romans 8:12-17*) They were no longer living for the desires of the flesh:

“Therefore since Christ suffered in the flesh, **you too** arm yourselves with the same mental disposition; because the person that has suffered in the flesh has desisted from sins, **to the end that he may live the remainder of [his] time in the flesh, no more for the desires of men, but for God’s will.** For the time that has passed by is sufficient for you to have worked out the will of the nations when you proceeded in deeds of loose conduct, lusts, excesses with wine, revelries, drinking matches, and illegal idolatries.” – *1 Peter 4:1-3*

Dear brothers, the Memorial supper is a solemn occasion. It is not a night of social frivolity. It is an acquiescence to the Spirit of Truth to reach our hearts and guide us into all truth. (*John 16:12-14*) It is a reminder that we have picked up our torture stakes and decided to follow the Christ continually. (*Matthew 16:24*) It is a declaration that we are willingly undergoing the baptism into death as the passage way to the heavenly career. (*Romans 6:3-4*)

Therefore, when we meet together on **March 26, 2013**, let us scrutinize ourselves. Do we acknowledge Jesus as the bread of life that allows us to live forever? Do we accept the guidance of the Spirit of Truth so that the ‘laws of the Father’ are written in our hearts? Do we want to commune with and uplift our brothers in our most holy faith? If so, let us meet together on this night and share in the Memorial emblems as courageous and determined sons of God, brothers of Christ and heirs to the Kingdom of the Heavens.

This is a night for the sons and daughters of God. Any who do not wish to share in Christ’s sacrifice, who reject the new covenant, who reject the heavenly career, and who refuse to lay down their fleshly lives to follow the Christ into heaven, are unworthy to partake in the Memorial supper and are unworthy of the Christ. Let us all who consider ourselves Christians awaken to our true hope and eat and drink worthily on our most sacred night.

We welcome your comments.

“Elaia Luchnia”