

Teaching Plan EXPLORE THE BIBLE

Date: April 8, 2018

Lesson Title: "Remembering the Sacrifice"

Lesson Passage: 1 Corinthians 11:17-29

ABOUT THIS LESSON

Although a portion of our lesson passage, 1 Cor. 11:23-26, has become a standard reading during the observance of the Lord's Supper in church services, Paul's main reason for writing this passage is revealed in

verse 18; the fragmentation of the Christian community in Corinth was showing up even at their "love feasts" (see Jude 12), gatherings where table fellowship was combined with worship. Paul implies that when church meetings are marked by discord, they do more harm than good.

TEACHING/LEARNING GOALS

- (1) Explain the probable nature of the Christian gatherings that Paul refers to in the lesson passage.
- (2) Describe the attitudes and behaviors that disrupted the fellowship of Christians in these meetings.

BEGINNING THE LESSON

To introduce the lesson, read 1 Cor. 11:23-26; then ask the class, "Where have you heard these words before?" (Undoubtedly, they will recall having heard this on occasions when the Lord's Supper was observed in church services.) Then comment: We tend to associate this Bible passage with our observance of the Lord's Supper, since it is regularly used for this purpose. But, when Paul wrote these words, his main purpose was not to tell the Christians in Corinth how to administer this ordinance; rather, his primary intention was to rebuke them for turning this sacred practice into an occasion for discord in their church fellowship.

TEACHING PROCEDURES

1. *Explain what Paul means by "when you come together" in 1 Cor. 11:17: (1) We can't know with certainty that Paul was speaking of a Sun-day church worship service, as we know it. (He doesn't indicate a particular day of the week.) (2) "When you assemble as a church" (v. 18) suggests that Paul is not describing private dinner parties where the hosts might determine their guest lists. Rather, any members of the Christian fellowship were free to come. (3) And the "eating" (v. 20) was more than the symbolic tasting of bread and wine that characterizes the Lord's Supper. These were Christian social occasions, not unlike today's potluck meals. However, we might gather from Paul's criticism--"it is not the Lord's supper that you eat" (v. 20)--that it was customary to include the Lord's Supper on these occasions.*

2. *Point out that Paul's reason for introducing this subject is made clear in 1 Cor. 11:18-21. We can sense his disapproval as we read his condemnation of the abuses that were undermining the spirit of fellowship in these gatherings: (1) The purpose of these "love feasts" was to promote a sense of unity and intimate relationship among Corinthians who shared faith in Christ, but who often had little else in common. Undoubtedly, many of them were household servants and slaves. But some of them were from the more well-to-do and socially refined elements of Corinthian society.*

Some were from a Jewish background, and some were Gentiles. In the absence of large meeting halls, they gathered in private homes; and, as is the case in our day, table fellowship was one of the best ways to cultivate a sense of togetherness. (2) But, unfortunately, these gatherings began to have exactly the opposite effect, when social status became more important than Christian fellowship. Very likely, food and drink were purchased from the church's common funds; but, probably, individuals brought their own contributions as well. (3) Apparently, many of the poorer Christians would arrive late at these gatherings (perhaps because of their work schedules); and, if most of the food had been consumed by early arrivals, the latecomers went hungry. Very likely, the early arrivals formed social cliques with their well-to-do friends as they consumed the choice foods together. And, to make matters worse, some of this well-fed group would drink too much (v. 21) as they socialized. So, while the late arrivals would sometimes suffer the embarrassment of having nothing to eat, some of their gluttonous dinner companions would be drunk.

3. Paul's reaction to this uncouth behavior was unequivocal (v. 22):

Those whose inconsiderate and self-serving attitudes would humiliate God's poor would do better to just stay at home; for they were negating the whole purpose of these fellowship meals. (Point out that this added to the major problem that he had mentioned at the beginning of this letter; the fragmentation of the fellowship in the Corinthian church.)

4. Observe that even though the Apostle's main purpose for writing this passage was to correct the divisive behavior already described, his moving description of the Lord's last supper with his disciples has given us a memorable interpretation of the truths we memorialize when we observe the Lord's Supper: (1) The broken bread is a reminder of the breaking of Christ's body in his death. But not only this, it was "broken for you" (11:24) a truth that is expressed vividly in the New Living Translation of Isaiah 53:5, "He was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be healed." (2) Jeremiah 31:31-34 helps us understand the idea of the "new Covenant" mentioned in 1 Cor. 11:25. And Wm. Barclay's translation clarifies the meaning of this verse: "This cup stands for the new relationship with God made possible at the cost of my death." (3) Note that, according to 1 Cor. 11:26, the Lord's Supper is not merely a symbolic ritual, it is a proclamation, a testimony to the truth that Jesus died for our sins.

CLOSING THE LESSON

Observe that, while the words of caution in 1 Cor. 11:27-29 are often applied to all "unconfessed sins," we should not fail to focus on the specific sins that Paul had in mind, the disruption of fellowship with other Christians by selfish, egotistical attitudes.

Lucien Coleman P.O. Box 2951 Weatherford TX 76086 682-262-1312