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1 Corinthians 11:29-32: The Lord's Judgment

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These verses appear in the context of Paul's correction of the Corinthian church with regard to its gathering for a meal together that included the observance of the Lord's Supper (11:17-34). The Lord's Supper was intended in part to remember the death of Christ for others. It was the preeminent example of love for others given at great personal sacrifice. The problem with the Corinthian church's act of remembrance was that their behavior toward one was itself so contrary to the life and death of Christ. Rather than being a community of people who associated freely with one another and shared equally in God's provision of food and drink, the Corinthian church was divided by social class and money.

The church supper as the setting for the observance of the Lord's Supper was an illustration of disregard and contempt for the poorer members of the community. Those with resources to share so that others could eat and drink instead selfishly indulged themselves to excess (11:21). Some in the Corinthian church had managed to turn a service of remembrance of self-sacrifice into an occasion for self-indulgence. This behavior, Paul warned, was not without consequence. Those who participated in the Lord's Supper while showing contemptuous disregard for others in the church (11:22) were guilty of dishonoring the body and blood of Christ (11:27). Paul intended this warning to provoke self-examination on the part of the guilty (11:28) that lead to self-discipline (11:33-34) and the end of this kind of behavior in the church.

In the midst of this section the verses that are the focus of this study appear (11:29-32). Paul uses several verbs in the "judgment" word group in these verses. These include two uses of the verb "judge" (*krino*, 11:31-32), two uses of the verb "examine" or "consider carefully" (*diakrino*, 11:29, 31) and finally the verb "condemn" is used (*katakrino*, 11:32). Paul's warning is that self-examination and correction must be carried out by those guilty of treating others with contempt in order to avoid the Lord's judgment. In fact, according to Paul, the Lord's judgment had already begun (11:30).

Significantly, however, Paul describes this judgment as "the Lord's discipline," using a word associated with the correction and training of children (*paideuo*, 11:32). It is certainly severe, however: "many of you are weak and sick, and quite a few are dead" (11:30). But the word Paul used to refer to death is also significant here. It is literally the

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word “sleep” (*koimao*), a euphemism for death that Paul used only for believers who died (1 Cor 7:39; 15:6, 18, 20, 51; 1 Thess 4:13-15).

Paul described this discipline of the Lord as a preventative act: “so that we may not be condemned with the world” (11:32). Paul in no way minimized the severity of the Lord’s discipline in the Corinthian community. And he no doubt hoped that his warning and explanation would produce repentance and genuine unity in the church. But even in the midst of this dire warning there is a word of assurance. The Lord disciplines the members of his body for a reason: “so that we may not be condemned with the world” (11:32). As he later wrote to this same church: “we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may be paid back according to what he has done while in the body, whether good or evil” (2 Cor 5:10). According to Paul, the ones who had been disciplined do not escape judgment, but they do escape condemnation. The church would be wise to celebrate the Lord’s Supper by following the example of the Lord: although rich he became poor for the sake of others (2 Cor 8:9) and spent himself in their behalf. It is in the context of love for others that the Lord’s death is rightly remembered. Then “every time you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor 11:26).