

“Body Unity and the Centrality of Christ in the Local Assembly”
Proper Etiquette for Men and Women in Local Church Worship
 Issues of Ministry
 Understanding the Lord’s Table

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 Title: Understanding the Lord’s Table – Part II: The commands of Christ in carrying out His table
 Text: 1 Corinthians 11:23-26
 Theme: The Lord’s Table is an intentional event that has gospel significance.

In our initial study of verses 17-22 we considered the idea of division, its problem and its necessity. Paul’s criticism of the problem is sharp. We also saw how the early church abused the symbolism of the feast preceding the Lord’s Table and in so doing undermined the message of the Table itself.

“The Agape [feast] is not a divine institution. Therefore Paul lays down no regulations concerning it.” (Lanski, 1 Corinthians, 462)

It is a visible or seen sermon. The Lord’s Table is one of God’s grace gifts to His church. In its symbolism we have the Lord’s death and in its celebration we have portrayed the unity of His people being of one body. Nothing else done by the church can so powerfully do this.

This is the earliest written account of the institution of the Lord’s Supper in the New Testament. It is important to note that this is the only time Paul quotes directly from our Lord’s words and it is the only time (here and in chapter 10) where he refers to the Lord’s Table. And his instruction is in response to the problem.

“Most conservative scholars agree that 1 Corinthians probably was written before any of the gospels. If that is true, Paul’s account here is the first biblical record of the institution of the Lord’s Supper, and includes direct quotations from Jesus.” (MacArthur, 1 Corinthians, 271).

The narrative emphasizes Jesus’ action of self-giving (expressed in the words over the bread and the cup) and his double command for us to repeat His own action.

Grammatically Paul emphasizes the idea that he received this directly from the Lord. It was not his own invention, but the Lord’s institution.

The Lord’s Table is a time to reflect on the cross and the consequences of it in the life of His people. It is because of the cross that we can have a meal in common. It is because of the cross that in the body of Christ there is neither male nor female, bond nor free, Jew nor Gentile. This is the power of the cross.

Matthew 26:26-30 reflects verses 23-26 where our Lord in the celebration of the Passover meal gave the elements present (i.e. unleavened bread and wine) new meaning. Jesus Christ voluntarily gave up His life for His people. In His death, His people would become one new man (Eph. 2:15). He has broken down the middle wall of partition that was between us (Eph. 2:14). Because of His cross work, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). This is what the Table powerfully communicates. When we divide the body through selfishness and pride, we are desecrating the cross work. To do so is to treat the Table in an unworthy manner and body division has its own divine (though providential) judgment against it.

Before we go any farther I would like to address the style of language used by our Lord in this feast of remembrance. Throughout Scripture Jesus uses metaphoric language to describe Himself. This is especially seen in the Gospel of John and the “I AM” statements. Had Jesus used the words “as” or “like” the difficulty of understanding what He said would have been lessened. Part of the complexity is that He uses concrete imagery as well as non-physical imagery such as “resurrection” and “truth.”

I am the bread of life (John 6:35, 41, 48, 51)

I am the light of the world (8:12, 9:5)

I am the door of the sheep (10:7, 9)

I am the good shepherd (10:11, 14)

I am the resurrection and the life (11:25)

I am the way, the truth, the life (14:6)

I am the true vine (15:1)

This brings us to a passage like John 6 where Jesus says we must eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood in order to have eternal life (6:53-56). Jesus was not promoting cannibalism but this was a difficult saying because He was calling on His audience to trust Him completely. His audience knew He was speaking in metaphor.

This same idea is present in the Lord’s Table when Jesus says, “This is my body and this is my blood.” The bread and wine do not become real flesh and blood rather they represent His flesh and blood. They are a picture.

ILLUSTRATION:

It is like me showing you a picture of my grandson Solomon. I can say “this is my grandson” and I can even point to his picture and say “this is my grandson.” I might say this is a picture of my grandson, but if I showed you a picture I believe you are smart enough to understand that the picture or medium used to communicate the idea is not my actual grandson. It is simply a picture of my grandson. My grandson exists somewhere else.

ILLUSTRATION:

The characters \$1.00 “represent” a dollar; no man would mistake them for a real dollar.

In addition to the Word of God, the Lord’s Table pictures the gospel. The power of the written Word is present in the visualized Word.

Jesus calls us to remember. He invites us not to forget.

“For the Hebrew to remember meant much more than simply to bring something to mind, merely to recall that it happened. To truly remember is to go back in one’s mind and recapture as much of the reality and significance of an event or experience as one possibly can.” (MacArthur, 1 Corinthians, 272)

ILLUSTRATION:

Most people who are married do not have to be reminded that they are married, but there is a visual that calls us back to the commitment we made to the marriage covenant and that is the wedding ring.

Minister to bride: do you take [this man] to be your husband; to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to understand, till death shall part you, according to the design of God in creation, and commit yourself completely to him?

Bride: I do

The ring ceremony: What token do you have of your commitment to this vow? She responds, “A ring.”

Minister to Bride, you will give the ring and repeat after me: “With this ring I pledge my life and love to you, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

The ring reminds us of a moment in time when we pledged ourselves to another. The Lord’s Table functions in the same way. It reminds us of a time when we pledged ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Lord’s Table is a picture of three primary ideas: of Calvary, of communion, and of coming. All of these things exist outside of the picture, but the picture reminds us of these things.

I. Remember the Past (vv. 24, 25) – This speaks of Calvary

In the Lord's Supper we remember the past. The covenant that brings us the forgiveness of sins was ratified, or “cut,” by the shedding of Christ's blood. The Lord instituted the Supper on the eve of His impending death in the context of a Passover meal. “Remembrance” itself is a covenantal word. The Jews were often commanded to “remember” God's acts of covenant faithfulness. In the Supper, Jesus has given us an ordinance by which we continually remember that our blessings were purchased through a costly price.

As the church we struggle with covenant language as if such language is only applicable to the nation of Israel yet as the church of God He has entered into covenant with His people and this covenant is New. There is a direct and immediate application of this covenant to the church and there is an eschatological significance for an ethnic group identified by the name Israel. How it all plays out and what it looks like is still foreign to me.

In verse 23 Paul makes reference to the “night in which He was betrayed.” As we remember the past redemptive work of Jesus Christ, I would like us to consider Calvary by highlighting three ideas.

A. The death Jesus Christ died was predetermined.

The cup our Lord refers to speaks of the death He was to die for the sins of His people. This can be seen in the following passages (Matt. 20:22, 23; 26:39, 42; John 18:11).

“And he went a little further, and fell on his face, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt” (Matt. 26:39).

“He went away again the second time, and prayed, saying, O my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink it, thy will be done” (Matt. 26:42).

“Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?” (John 18:11).

The night our Lord offered up Himself for our sins was not random. It was a special night appointed by the Father for the sacrificing of His only begotten Son.

His death was according to plan. His death was not because of the fall as if the fall of man caused the death of Christ. Both the fall and His death were a part of His eternal purpose. If the redemptive activity of God was in response to the fall of man into sin and if the redemptive activity of God forms a primary aspect

of His revelation and activity, then most of what happened would not have happened had man not fallen into sin. Although God's redemptive activity in the life and death of Jesus Christ restores a fallen creation and reconciles man to God this was not a reaction by God to man, but a part of God's purpose all along.

The second idea we desire to understand is that the death Jesus Christ died was powerful.

B. The death Jesus Christ died was powerful

The death Jesus Christ died was powerful in that its outcome is dependent and determined by God not by man. God never sits as victim of His own sovereignty. God knows the exact number of who will be saved. He has made sure that such an end is attained. There has never been a trace of worry across the brow of God.

The word "broken" in verse 24 is used in the Gospel's to speak of His body broken (Matt. 26:26; Mark 14:22; Luke 22:19; 24:30). It is also used to describe the Lord's Table as it was celebrated by the early church (Acts 2:46; 20:7; 27:35; 1 Cor. 10:16). It is also used of feeding the multitudes with the bread that had been broken (Matt. 14:19; 15:36). Remember the breaking of the bread and the pouring out of the grape juice is a symbolic act that pictures for us the breaking of His body through crucifixion and the pouring out of His blood for the sins of the world.

Although John 19:36 speaks of nothing of our Lord being broken, the act of crucifixion is a "breaking" of the body. It is of interest to note that there is debate as to the genuineness of the word "broken" in the gospel narratives and here in 1 Corinthians 11. Its presence or absence does not affect our understanding of the text.

The third idea we desire to understand is that the death Jesus Christ died was precious.

C. The death Jesus Christ died was precious

The death Jesus Christ died secured for Himself a precious people. Not only was the death He died priceless (1 Pet. 1:18-20) but the outcome of this priceless death is a precious people.

¹⁸ "knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, ¹⁹ but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ.

²⁰ For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you" (1 Pet. 1:18-20).

The Old Testament called them the believing remnant and the New Testament calls them the church, the body of Christ. You and I as the people of God are precious (Acts 20:28).

The covenant was ratified by blood. In the blood was the life of the covenant (Lev. 17:11). It is this blood that makes white the garments of His people (Rev. 7:14).

The second picture for the present of the Lord's Table is that of communion.

II. Enjoy the Present (v. 26a) – This speaks of Communion

Notice verse 18: "In the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that divisions exist among you." When you come together "as a church." Here "church" is not the universal body of Christ. This is not the people of God in all places and all times. This is the people of God gathered in one place for worship and ministry. This is what we call a "local church." The Lord's Table is a local church truth. This does not negate its practice among non-local church gatherings, but its true significance is found in the context of the local assembly.

The New Covenant and the New Covenant People February 7, 1993
<http://www.desiringgod.org/library/sermons/93/020793.html>

ILLUSTRATION:

Remember when families lived together? I do not. I have grown up in an era that disperses and disappears. Yet there was a time when generations lived and died in the same home; where dying family members passed their days until they died. There was a strong sense of community, heritage, and family. Generational stories were passed along between family members. Those days are gone. We might annually get the entire family together, but for the most part we are scattered and have lost a sense of family unity. Our elderly parents have become an inconvenience and our children live their own lives in separate geographical locations. The Lord's Table is to remind us of our Christian family. This table calls us to be generational and gender sensitive. Do the young in our fellowship know the old? Do the singles in our fellowship know the various married couples within the WBC family? What are we doing, what are you doing to connect with your brothers and sisters in Christ?

Every time we celebrate the Lord's Table we are celebrating a "Home Coming" of sorts. We are going back to our roots and we are telling the generations that follow us of our heritage, our past. And in addition to the past, we communicate something about the present and we proclaim something about the future.

In the Lord's Supper, we enjoy the present. Jesus has brought us into fellowship with others in the death of Jesus Christ. When we come together "as

a church,” we can eat as a body in the presence of the Lord Jesus. The emphasis here is on a joyous meal, a covenant celebration.

“The Lord's supper is an affirmation of Christian community. It is a declaration that we are a people bound under a new agreement with the living Lord which sets us apart as an eternal community - a people bound in love to one another and to the Lord.”
 “The Lord's Supper,” Rev. Bryan Findlayson, Lectionary Bible Studies and Sermons, Pumpkin Cottage Ministry Resources.

When we partake of the Lord's Table we are proclaiming the gospel. The word “proclaim” is also translated “preach.” The Lord's Table is a visual that preaches the gospel to the audience. It is through His shed blood and broken body that He secured for His people an eternal redemption. It is only through Him that people from every tongue, tribe, people, and nation will come and worship.

The third picture of the future of the Lord's Table is that of coming.

III. Look Forward to the Future (v. 26b) – This speaks of Coming

In the Supper, we look forward to the future: “you do show the Lord's death until he comes.” This ordinance is to be repeated (“as often as you do it”) until Christ returns. Each time we proclaim His death in the Supper, we are also reminded that He is returning. In His death, burial and resurrection Christ was removed from us physically. The Holy Spirit now gives us Christ's presence. When He returns, our faith will become sight.

We are so anxious to study the book of Revelation and Last Things that we overlook why such things exist. We become consumed by the shadow that we overlook the substance. The exciting thing about Jesus coming is Jesus coming. It is not the world events that currently unfold around us. It is not my intent to undermine long cherished beliefs but **when** Christ returns (whether it is pre, mid, pre-wrath, or post) is of **secondary importance** to Him.

Nothing about the *eschatos* matters except Christ. I am not trying to oversimplify, but God the Father will once more send His Son and through the power of the Holy Spirit His people will be gathered unto Him and His Kingdom will be set up on earth and He will rule directly and immediately over all things created.

APPLICATION: (What does this look like?)

Given these three dimensions - past, present, and future - it is no wonder that in the early church the Lord's Supper was “the central action in Christian worship.”

How do you understand the Lord's Table?

1. How have I applied (or can I apply) this passage to my life?

- Do you know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior from sin? Do you know Christ and His redemptive work at Calvary's cross?

The Gospel presented

For the truth of Scripture to change your life through renewing your mind you must be in a right relationship with God the Father through Jesus Christ His Son. This relationship is impossible apart from the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. This relationship is built around four key ideas. They can be summed up in four words: God, man, Christ, and response.

GOD

There is a real and personal God who is both Creator and Judge before whom you will stand and give an account as both creature and criminal.

MAN – RECOGNIZE

You have rebelled against God. We've all participated in this sinful rebellion. As a result, we have alienated ourselves from God and have exposed ourselves to His righteous wrath, which will banish us eternally to hell if we do not accept the work of Christ for the forgiveness of our sins.

CHRIST – REALIZE

But God sent Jesus *Christ*, fully God and fully man, to die the death that we deserved for our sins – the righteous for the unrighteous – so that God might both punish our sin in Christ and forgive it in us.

RESPONSE – RECEIVE

The only saving *response* to this Good News is to believe in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ (John 1:12; Acts 16:30, 31).

Have you turned to Jesus Christ as your only hope of eternal life? Today, this can happen to you.

- As one who has accepted the work of Christ for your sins are you in communion with the body of Christ or are you emotionally separated from people?

Your communion with the people of God reflects the cross. Your disharmony with the local body of Christ denigrates the purpose of the cross. If you are a member out of joint, then today you need to reconcile yourself to the church of Christ.

- As a believer are you living with hopeful expectation at the imminent return of our Lord Jesus Christ?

It is the hope of Christ's future return that infuses this moment with patient endurance. Do not lose hope. Jesus Christ is coming today.

2. Have I kept Christ in the application?

In the absence of who He is and what He has done, no one is able to stand before the Father accepted. It is because of Him that you are now worthy to come. Let us never forget the past, present, and future message of the Table proclamation.

“These hymns were written between 1765 and 1773 at the village of Olney (OHN'ee) where Cowper was under the influence of the Anglican Evangelical preacher John Newton. This was a period of great religious fervor within the Evangelical movement and for Cowper, and this enthusiasm is clear in the poems. Less clear, but still visible, are the lingering affects of the madness which debilitated Cowper in 1762 and to which he again succumbed in 1773.”

Welcome To The Table

This is the feast of heavenly wine,
 And God invites to sup;
 The juices of the living vine
 Were press'd to fill the cup.
 Oh! bless the Saviour, ye that eat,
 With royal dainties fed;
 Not heaven affords a costlier treat,
 For Jesus is the bread.
 The vile, the lost, He calls to them;
 Ye trembling souls appear!
 The righteous in their own esteem
 Have no acceptance here.
 Approach, ye poor, nor dare refuse
 The banquet spread for you;
 Dear Savior, this is welcome news,
 Then I may venture too.
 If guilt and sin afford a plea,
 And may obtain a place,
 Surely the Lord will welcome me,
 And I shall see His face.

Olney Hymns, William Cowper, from Cowper's Poems, Sheldon & Company,
 New York

