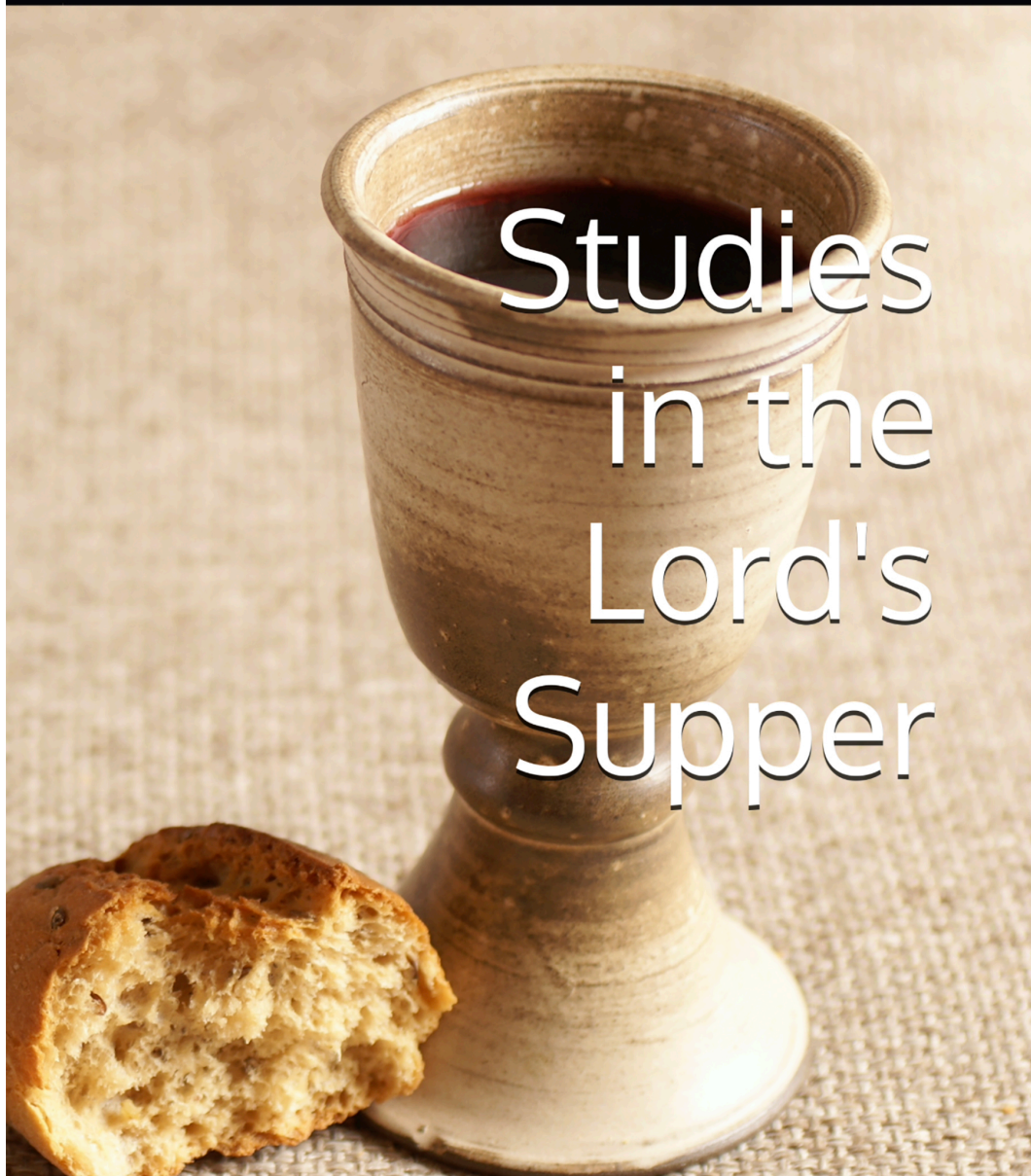


Shawn Moynihan

Studies
in the
Lord's
Supper



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DEDICATION

To Cathie, who shows the truth of God's promise: "He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord" (Prov 18:22 NIV).

Studies in the Lord's Supper

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DEDICATION

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INTRODUCTION

Two thousand years ago, on a spring evening in an upper room in Jerusalem, thirteen people met together. Although this event is popularly known as the “Last Supper”¹, it was actually the “First Supper”. On the night he was betrayed, Jesus did something for the first time. He directed his disciples to come together, in the context of a meal, to remember him, to affirm covenant commitments through self-reflection, and to proclaim his death. Jesus further stated that he expected his followers to participate in this ritual “often”; therefore, the Lord’s Supper began in Jerusalem, continues to this day, and will extend into the kingdom (Luke 22:16,18).

It is easy to see how important this event was to Jesus. His emotional connection to the institution of the Bread and Cup leaps off the page: “With all my heart I have longed to eat this Passover with you before the time comes for me to suffer” (Luke 22:16 Phillips). Although Jesus fulfilled a Mosaic Law that contained countless rituals (Matt 5:17), he required his followers to keep only two: the Lord’s Supper and baptism. Of these two, baptism is done once; therefore, the only ongoing ritual

¹ As a community, we use many titles for this rite. Most have strong Biblical support. “Breaking of Bread” was a title clearly used by the early ecclesia (Acts 2:42). The “Lord’s Supper” was similarly understood by first century believers to be a title for the ritual that Christ established (1 Cor 11:20). Calling it the “Bread and Cup” follows Jesus’ own words in instituting the practice (Luke 22:19-21). The term “Memorials”, or “Memorial Service”, is not used in Scripture; however, such terms certainly capture the intent of Jesus’ command to observe the ritual in memory of him (Luke 22:19). The first-century ecclesia used three other titles that emphasize the active nature of the ritual. “Thanksgiving” (Greek *eucharestia*) is built on Jesus’ repeated thanks (Luke 22:17, 19), and historical documents from the first-century show that the community called the ritual “Thanksgiving” or Eucharist. The second title used by the early ecclesia is variously translated as “Participation” or “Sharing” or “Communion” (1 Cor 10:16). The third title is the *agape*, or “love feast” (Jude 1:12).

demanding by Jesus is participation in the Lord's Supper. Jesus instituted this for us and invites us to follow his example of longing to eat it with all our heart.

Since I joined our community of faith in 1982, I estimate that I have followed Christ's command to "do this in remembrance of me" over two thousand times. I remember the first time I partook of the Bread and Cup as a new member of God's family. The sense of connection to God, to Christ, to my brothers and sisters was palpable.

Sadly, I confess that my experiences at the Lord's Table since then have varied considerably. Some of these times have been life-changing, many of them have been routine, and a few have been empty. Some have been marked by a remembrance that resulted in a deep connection to God, His Son, and the family of God. Others were remarkable for a deeply felt sense of isolation. Some prompted meaningful (sometimes painful) self-examination, while others have been bereft of self-examination.

This book is my attempt to recapture Jesus' intention for his Supper. Like the two disciples on the road to Emmaus, I want to know Jesus in the Breaking of Bread (Luke 24:30-31). Jesus established the rite to connect us to our Father, to connect us to him, and to connect us to each other. As we will see in future chapters, it is the embodiment of many crucial elements of God's plan and purpose. Jesus used the ritual to connect us to our individual and collective past through remembrance, to connect us to the present through self-examination, and to connect us to the future.

This book is my attempt to better understand the Lord's Supper so that my participation glorifies God and Christ. I have organized the book into four sections. The first section is The Lord's Supper as "This Passover". It is imperative that we understand the Lord's Supper in the context of Jesus' identification of it as "this Passover". We'll explore how Jesus would have kept the Passover and all its implications for our discipleship and how we should prepare for and celebrate the rite that he instituted and commanded us to celebrate.

The second section is Powerful Symbols. Here, we explore the incredibly rich symbolism of the Bread and Cup. Although I have attempted to weave an explanation of symbols and types throughout

the book, I have focused on this aspect in this section. Similarly, the Mosaic types and shadows are discussed throughout the book, but I have devoted a chapter to two Mosaic types that are fulfilled at the Lord's Table: the Bread of the Presence and the Peace Offering.

The Lord's Supper is essentially the celebration of a restored relationship between God and His children, marked by covenant and made possible by the redemptive work of Jesus. The third section addresses the relationships signified by every element of the Lord's Supper. Sadly, Christ's disciples used the Lord's Table as a forum for determining the "greatest" amongst them. Do we make the same kind of mistake in assuming our relationship with God and Christ is unaffected by our approach to others at the Lord's Table?

Section four is entitled "Partaking". We'll explore the actions required of us at the Lord's Table, especially giving thanks and remembering. We discuss Jesus' "hard saying" to eat his flesh and drink his blood. Many phrases are ubiquitous when we celebrate the Lord's Supper, but do we fully grasp their meaning? What does it mean to "show the Lord's death"? How do we discern the Lord's body? What does it mean to partake in an unworthy manner? We attempt to answer these important questions.

The final section shows how the first-century ecclesia celebrated the Lord's Supper and how this practice dramatically changed over the first few centuries of the Common Era. We also trace how our community of faith has practiced the Lord's Supper from the 1850s to the current day. The final chapter, called A New "Old" Way of Keeping the Lord's Supper, is devoted to recapturing how the first-century ecclesia approached the Lord's Supper, a way that—like the Passover meal—invites a greater level of participation and involvement than is represented by the current norm. It is important to consider exploring ways of celebrating the Lord's Supper in these last days to engage those who are not attending (Heb 10:26), especially in a post-COVID world.

I pray that this book will help readers deepen their connection to God, to Christ, and to each other. May we all, through God's grace, take up the cup at Christ's table in the kingdom.

SECTION ONE

The Lord's Supper as "This Passover"

CHAPTER ONE	Passover is the Foundation
CHAPTER TWO	A "Real" Passover?
CHAPTER THREE	Preparing "This Passover"
CHAPTER FOUR	Celebrating "This Passover"

CHAPTER ONE

Passover is the Foundation

“So they went and found it just as He had said to them, and they prepared the Passover. When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. Then He said to them, ‘With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.’”

(Luke 22:13-15)

Jesus himself built the celebration of the Lord's Supper on the foundation of the Passover feast. Any exploration of the Lord's Supper should start with its relationship to Passover:

When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. Then He said to them, “With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you, I will no longer eat of it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.” (Luke 22:14-16)

Jesus refers to the institution of the Lord's Supper as “this Passover”. Therefore, we must view the Lord's Supper as a kind of new Passover, one that looks back to the feast instituted by Moses and looks forward to the meal that will be celebrated in the kingdom of God. As noted in *Elpis Israel*, “The bread and wine of ‘the Lord's supper’ are the remains of the Passover, which are to be shared by the circumcised of heart and ears, until Christ comes in power and great glory.”²

Christ clearly wanted us to understand the Lord's Supper as a kind of Passover.

² John Thomas, *Elpis Israel* (Birmingham: CMPA, 1849. Electronic edition: 2013)

By identifying the Lord's Supper with the Passover, Christ provides a set of rich, powerful, and deeply spiritual meanings to help us understand the importance and impact of this unique ritual.

Just as the Passover was created to memorialize the act that freed the children of Israel from slavery to Egypt, the new Passover memorialized the act that set the children of God free from bondage to sin (Rom 5:5-23). In both the Passover and the Lord's Supper, the family of God gathers to tell the story of redemption, to express joy at God's mercy, and to remember. Like the Passover, the Lord's Supper remembers the past, embraces the present, and hopes for the future. One writer³ captures this sense of celebratory timelessness: "Thus, this breaking of bread, by itself and in its association with the Passover, stretches both to a remote past and a stupendous future, while entwining itself with the public life of the present hour. What strength these true and powerful thoughts impart."

It is remarkable how many times Jesus established the context of the meal—eaten with the Twelve on the night he was betrayed—as a Passover. He is emphatic that the communal meal shared with the Twelve was a Passover. In the early days of our community, the crucial foundational context of Passover was accepted as fact; it was widely understood that the Lord's Supper "was originally instituted when Jesus and his disciples were met together for the last time to observe the Jewish Passover."⁴

John's account of Christ's meal with the Twelve (John 13:2-14:31) does not explicitly contextualize the meal as a Passover celebration. This is an interesting omission because John does not shy away from symbolically connecting Christ's work to Passover. John begins his gospel with John the Baptist explicitly identifying Christ with the Passover lamb: "The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, 'Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!'" (John 1:29). Furthermore, John begins following Jesus upon the recognition that he was the lamb: "Again, the next day, John stood with two of his disciples. And looking at Jesus as He walked, he said,

³ Robert Roberts, "Sunday at the Birmingham Christadelphian Ecclesia," *The Christadelphian* (April 1897)

⁴ Robert Roberts, *Christendom Astray* (Birmingham: CMPA, 1884. Electronic edition: 2014)

'Behold the Lamb of God!'" (John 1:35-36). William Barclay, a prominent scholar of the New Testament who believed that Jesus ate the Passover meal, asserted that John wrote "his narrative to show Jesus as the Lamb of God...we believe that he rearranged his material to show Jesus as the lamb slain from the foundation of the world."⁵ If this assertion is accurate, then we can understand John's narrative "gap", not as an omission but rather as a conscious choice to emphasize Jesus as the true Passover lamb.

John documents several key events in Christ's ministry in the context of the Passover celebration (e.g., John 2; John 6), but he does not explicitly portray Christ's final meal as a Passover. The three synoptic gospels provide a consistent connection to Passover. John, however, does not. Without exception, Matthew, Mark, and Luke portray the Lord's Supper as a Passover feast, while John's gospel seems to state that Jesus was arrested prior to the Passover meal.

The next chapter compares and contrasts the synoptic gospels' accounts with John's account and explores possible explanations for John's apparently contradictory narrative.

⁵ William Barclay, *The Lord's Supper* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2001)

CHAPTER TWO

A “Real” Passover?

“Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, and it was early morning. But they themselves did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover.”

(John 18:28)

Let's be clear. Matthew, Mark, and Luke state that Jesus ate a Passover meal with the Twelve. However, John's gospel makes no direct mention of Christ's last meal being a Passover and appears to state that the Passover meal occurred after Christ was arrested. Since there is an apparent contradiction between John and the synoptics, the task before us is two-fold: to harmonize the four gospel accounts and to explain why John did not explicitly depict Jesus eating a Passover meal when the other three gospels were so careful to do so.

What Did Jesus Call the Meal He Was Eating?

In order to reconcile the gospel accounts of the Lord's Supper, we need to examine all facets of the issue. A logical starting point is determining what Christ thought he was doing when he gathered the Twelve for the institution of his supper. From Jesus' own words, it is clear that he viewed his final meal as a Passover:

- “Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, ‘The Teacher says, “My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at your house with My disciples”’ (Matt 26:18).
- “Wherever he goes in, say to the master of the house, ‘The

Teacher says, "Where is the guest room in which I may eat the Passover with My disciples?" (Mark 14:14)

- And He sent Peter and John, saying, "Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat" (Luke 22:8).
- "Then you shall say to the master of the house, 'The Teacher says to you, "Where is the guest room where I may eat the Passover with My disciples?"'" (Luke 22:11)
- "Then He said to them, 'With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer'" (Luke 22:15).

The weight of evidence leaves no alternative other than to understand that Jesus called his final meal a Passover.

What Meal Did the Twelve Think They Were Eating?

How did the disciples view the meal they shared with Christ on the night he was betrayed? The disciples' own words provide the answer to this question:

- "Now on the first day of the Feast of the Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying to Him, 'Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?'" (Matt 26:17)
- "Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they killed the Passover lamb, His disciples said to Him, 'Where do You want us to go and prepare, that You may eat the Passover?'" (Mark 14:12)

From their own words, it is apparent that the Twelve thought they were preparing the Passover meal. The gospel writers also confirm that the disciples were indeed preparing a Passover meal to share with Christ:

- "So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them; and they prepared the Passover" (Matt 26:19).
- "So His disciples went out, and came into the city, and found it just as He had said to them; and they prepared the Passover" (Mark 14:16).
- "So they went and found it just as He had said to them, and they prepared the Passover" (Luke 22:13).

The overwhelming weight of the textual evidence clearly shows that Christ thought he was eating the Passover, the disciples thought they were eating the Passover, and the synoptic gospel writers thought Christ and the disciples ate the Passover.

What Other Evidence Indicates that the Meal was the Passover?

Beyond the direct textual evidence, much scholarly effort has been devoted to showing that there are several indirect clues from which one can infer that the meal was, in fact, a Passover. Perhaps the best representative of this scholarship is *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus*, where German Lutheran scholar Joachim Jeremias states there are fourteen indirect clues that show why the meal must have been a Passover.⁶

One of Jeremias' reasons explains a mystery of Christ's last week. It was not Christ's practice to remain in Jerusalem for the evenings (e.g., Mark 11:11; Luke 21:37). However, all four gospel accounts depict the evening meal being eaten in Jerusalem, despite the danger of being in the city as opposed to the relative safety of Bethany (Mark 14:1-3). Jeremias argues that the reason why Christ didn't follow his customary practice of leaving the city was in order to follow the Teachers of the Law's dictum that pilgrims must eat the Passover inside the walls of Jerusalem. This argument is the best explanation for Christ breaking with his normal practice of leaving Jerusalem before evening.

Another of Jeremias' rationales explains a puzzling event captured exclusively by John. When Judas Iscariot left the table, the disciples thought he was leaving to provide alms to the poor (John 13:29). Referencing Josephus, the Mishnah, and Aramaic Passover practice, Jeremias states:

It is difficult to imagine that it was Jesus' custom to arrange for the distribution of alms at night; but it must have been a custom or the disciples would not have interpreted the sudden, nocturnal disappearance in this way. *It was, however, customary to do something for the poor on the Passover night. (Jeremias' emphasis)*

⁶ Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (Philadelphia: SCM Press, 1966)

Apparently, Judas Iscariot used a Passover custom as a cover for his clandestine meeting with the rulers who sought to arrest Jesus.

In addition to Jeremias' assertions, there is one additional clue—found only in John—that the meal was a Passover. John's gospel records Christ speaking about "the sop": "He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it. And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon" (John 13:26 KJV). The use of the definite article with "sop" suggests that it refers to the specific Passover sop made famous by Jewish sage Hillel⁷. The Hillel sop was a kind of sandwich created by the Passover host and distributed to all the participants. The sandwich consisted of a piece of the lamb, a piece of unleavened bread, and some bitter herbs, all wrapped together and dipped in the sauce. Jewish readers of John's gospel would have immediately understood that the reference to "the sop" implied that the meal was a Passover.

The Meal and the Passover in John's Gospel

Let's look at how John uses the word "Passover" (*pascha* in Greek) in the context of the Lord's Supper. John begins the countdown to Passover in John 12:1, where he uses the Feast as a reference point to situate Mary's anointing of Christ as preparation for his death. John's next use of Passover has led some to use it as evidence that the Lord's Supper occurred prior to Passover: "Now before the Feast of the Passover [*pascha*], when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father" (John 13:1). This verse suggests that the meal, which John begins narrating in the subsequent verse, occurred before the Passover meal.

However, grammatically, this verse does not refer to the timing of the meal. The verse means simply that Jesus knew—before the Passover feast began—that he was going to be crucified. Read in this way, the verse is a parallel with Matthew 26: 2: "You know that after two days is the Passover [*pascha*], and the Son of Man will be delivered up to be crucified." Therefore, rather than contradicting the synoptic account, John 13:1 reinforces Matthew's narrative and builds on the concepts

⁷ "Hillel's sandwich", haggadot.com

put forward in John's account of the anointing at Bethany.

John's next use of the word "Passover" directly contradicts the synoptic accounts. In John 18:28, we read: "Then they led Jesus from Caiaphas to the Praetorium, and it was early morning. But they themselves did not go into the Praetorium, lest they should be defiled, but that they might eat the Passover [*pascha*]." As was the custom of the day, John used *pascha* to refer to the entire week of Passover activities, including the Passover feast and the Feast of Unleavened Bread (John 2:13, 23; John 6:4; John 11:55; John 12:1; John 13:1). Unlike the other gospels, John never refers to both Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread; rather, John conflates the two by simply using the term Passover. John's usage is in keeping with the common practice of the day. American Greek scholars William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich state that the "popular usage merged the two festivals and treated them as a unity, as they were for practical purposes."⁸

The best example of how John uses *pascha* in a generic way is John 18:39: "But you have a custom that I should release someone to you at the Passover. Do you therefore want me to release to you the King of the Jews?" Here, *pascha* doesn't mean "sunrise to sunset on Nisan 14"; rather, it refers to the time of Passover week.

If we accept the premise that John used *pascha* as a generic term, signifying the events of Passover week, then we can see that the meal referred to in John 18:28 might be the *chagigah*, the festive Sabbath meal that was celebrated the day following the Passover meal. Given the overwhelming evidence provided by the synoptic gospels that Christ ate the Passover meal on the evening of Nisan 14 with his disciples, it is plausible that John is stating that the religious leaders wanted to be allowed to celebrate the *chagigah*.

In John 19:14, we have another direct contradiction of the other three gospels: "Now it was the Preparation [*paraskeuē*] Day of the Passover [*pascha*], and about the sixth hour. And he said to the Jews, 'Behold your King!'" This verse seems to suggest that Christ was on the cross and the Passover meal had yet to occur. Again, John is using "Passover" in a broad manner, encompassing the significant events of

⁸ F. Wilbur Gingrich and William Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: U of Chicago Press, 1979)

that week, including the Sabbath. The other gospels use *paraskeuê* in exactly this way to describe the same event:

- “Now when evening had come, because it was the Preparation [*paraskeuê*] Day, that is, the day before the Sabbath” (Mark 15:42).
- “That day was the Preparation [*paraskeuê*], and the Sabbath drew near” (Luke 23: 54).

The “preparation” to which John refers is the preparation for the Sabbath of Passover week.

Other Perspectives on the Meal as a Passover

Although we can harmonize the four gospel accounts by acknowledging that John uses *pascha* in a slightly different way from the synoptic gospels, there are other plausible reasons for believing that John’s account should be accepted at face value and that the synoptic gospels should be read in a manner that asserts that Christ died before the “real” Passover meal. One reason is to emphasize the importance of Christ fulfilling the type of the Passover sacrifice by being crucified at the exact same time as the Passover lambs were being ritually killed at the Temple. The reasoning is that Christ had to be sacrificed at the same time the lambs were killed; therefore, Christ had to be killed prior to the Passover.

My response to this line of reasoning is threefold. First, the Divine Plan clearly did not require precise fulfillment of the Mosaic Law regarding Christ’s sacrifice. The method of Christ’s sacrifice was markedly different from the method of sacrificing the Passover lamb. This difference was part of God’s plan. Christ was not to have his throat cut; rather, he was to be “lifted up” on a stake:

- “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:14-15).
- “‘And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all peoples to myself.’ This He said, signifying by what death He would die” (John 12:32-33).

Second, why is the precise fulfillment of the sacrifice thought to be more important than the precise fulfillment of the ceremony that gave meaning to the sacrifice? If one argues that the timing of events is crucial, why is the timing of the sacrifice prioritized over the timing of the ceremony that Christ himself instituted to give meaning to his sacrifice? Christ's own words demonstrate that he needed the celebration of the Passover with the Twelve to precede his own sacrifice: "With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:15). The Passover prepared him for the cross.

Third, the account in Mark specifically states that Christ was still alive when the Passover lambs were ceremonially killed: "Now on the first day of Unleavened Bread, when they killed the Passover lamb, His disciples said to Him, 'Where do You want us to go and prepare, that You may eat the Passover?'" (Mark 14:12). Christ's disciples were questioning him as to the preparation of the meal on the same day that the lambs were sacrificed. Luke also emphasizes that the lambs were killed while Christ was still alive: "Then came the Day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover must be killed. And He sent Peter and John, saying, 'Go and prepare the Passover for us, that we may eat'" (Luke 22:7-8).

If one uses John's account as the basis for understanding the institution of the Lord's Supper, then one might believe that Christ didn't celebrate the Passover at the appointed time. Although many complicated rationales have been provided (e.g., different calendars, differences in practice between Judean and Galilean Jews, differences in practice between Pharisees and Sadducees, etc.), there are two simple explanations for reconciling any perceived conflicts between the three synoptic gospels and John:

1. Christ ate the Passover meal prior to the evening of Nisan 14.
2. Christ ate a different meal, which he called a Passover.

Both options suggest an unusual meal, a meal that was called a Passover but wasn't really a Passover. If the meal were unusual in this way, then the disciples surely would have registered their surprise and questioned Christ. Remember, the Twelve were full of questions at the table. They didn't hesitate to ask bold and pointed questions: "Where

are you going?”, “How can we know where you are going?”, “Can you show us the Father?”, “Why don’t you show the world what you have shown us?” Therefore, one would think that if the meal were not the usual Passover meal, then the disciples would have voiced their questions or concerns. However, no such questions were recorded. From my perspective, neither of the two options above makes sense. As we have seen, the overwhelming Biblical evidence, including Christ’s own testimony (e.g., “prepare the Passover”, “I have desired to eat this Passover with you”, etc.), is that he ate a “normal” Passover meal on the night he was betrayed.

Why Didn’t John Identify the Meal as a Passover?

Although he doesn’t explicitly identify the meal as a Passover, John’s record of the meal mirrors the other three gospel accounts in many ways. The striving amongst the disciples occurs in both Luke 22:24-30 and John 13:3-17, 34. Jesus’ announcement that one of them would betray him and the subsequent dialogue occurs in John 13:18-32, Luke 22:21-23, Matt 26:21-25 and Mark 14:18-21. Christ’s prediction of Peter’s denial is recorded in John 13:33, 36-38, and in Luke 22:31-34.

Also, John’s account of the meal includes details that the synoptics omit. From John, we learn of Christ’s dialogue with Thomas, Philip, and Judas (not Iscariot). We learn of Christ’s words of comfort for the disciples, and we see Christ connecting the disciples to him and to the Father.

Although the King James Version (KJV) suggests that John begins the supper narrative at the conclusion of the meal (i.e., “supper being ended”), this is not an accurate translation. The Greek verb tense really suggests a meal in progress, not a meal that has concluded. The Disciples’ Literal New Testament (DLNT) renders John 13:2 in this way: “And dinner taking-place, the devil having already put into his heart that Judas, son of Simon Iscariot, should hand Him over.” Most modern translations capture this sense as “The evening meal was in progress” (NET, NIV), and Mounce translates the verse as “The devil had already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray Jesus. During the evening meal...” Unlike the other three gospels, which spend so much time detailing the preparation of the meal as a

Passover, John's account joins the meal already in progress. However, he adds one powerful detail not found in the synoptics—Christ's washing of the disciples' feet and his subsequent interaction with Peter.

John makes one crucial omission. Unlike the other three gospels, he does not mention the Cup or the Broken Bread. Therefore, what we view as the essential elements of the Lord's Supper, John leaves out entirely. This is a curious omission, given the crucial role played by the Cup and Broken Bread in the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Why is John's account of the meal so different from the other three gospels?

I think that John felt that he didn't need to reiterate many of the events and concepts that the earlier three gospels covered. John himself seems to suggest that his gospel is the last of the canonical four to be written: "And there are also many other things that Jesus did, which if they were written one by one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written" (John 21:25). John routinely includes events that are not found in the synoptics. When there is no mention of the event in the synoptics (e.g., the wedding at Cana, the dialogue with Nicodemus, the Samaritan woman at the well, etc.), there is no criticism that the four gospels are in conflict. John gives a very detailed account that differs from the other three, but that doesn't mean there is an unresolvable conflict.

Indeed, John provides us with the most in-depth account of Christ's teaching at the Lord's Supper, beginning in John 13:31, continuing through chapter 14, and sustained even as they left the upper room and made their way to Gethsemane on the darkened Jerusalem streets and across the Kidron valley. Alone among the four gospels, John records Christ's words, which were designed to move the Twelve past his crucifixion to the new reality of Christ being "with them" in a different way. John didn't need to explicitly mention the Cup and the Bread because the other three gospels had addressed them so thoroughly. Instead, John captures Christ's words about how he expected the disciples to move on in his absence by embodying his character and purpose.

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In a traditional Passover meal, the head of the household leads the discussion. If the head of the household knew he was going to die before the next Passover, he would want his family to be able to carry on the Passover meal in his absence. This is the sentiment John captures in his unique account of Christ's interactions with his spiritual family during and after the meal. In the synoptic accounts, Christ commands the Twelve to remember him. In John's account, Christ tells them how to do it:

- “For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you” (John 13:15).
- “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35).

The Apparent Contradiction Resolved

So, does John's account contradict the other three gospels? No, because whether you think Christ ate a “real” Passover meal with his disciples or whether you think he ate a Passover meal before the rest of Israel celebrated the Feast, it is clear that our Lord wants us to approach his table with the Passover in mind.

Scripture suggests that there is evidence that Christ celebrated a “real” Passover, as indicated by the synoptic gospels. There is also evidence in John to suggest that the “real” Passover occurred after the crucifixion. No matter which evidence we find most compelling, our focus must be on the irrefutable fact that Christ clearly and repeatedly connected the institution of the Lord's Supper with the Passover. Christ wants us to understand that the Lord's Supper is built on the foundation of the Passover.

CHAPTER THREE

Preparing “This Passover”

“So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them; and they prepared the Passover. When evening had come, He sat down with the twelve.”

(Matt 26:19-20)

Passover was a celebration that required dedicated preparation. The gospel accounts emphasize how Christ and the Twelve prepared to celebrate the Passover. When the Twelve ask Christ about Passover preparations, it is clear that his preparations were meticulous:

Now on the first day of the Feast of the Unleavened Bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying to Him, “Where do You want us to prepare for You to eat the Passover?” And He said, “Go into the city to a certain man, and say to him, ‘The Teacher says, “My time is at hand; I will keep the Passover at your house with My disciples.”’” So the disciples did as Jesus had directed them; and they prepared the Passover. (Matt 26:17-19)

Mindful of the rulers’ determination to arrest and murder him, Christ’s preparation was essential to ensure that the Passover could be kept without interruption. Christ’s preparation for the Passover has many lessons for us as we come to the Lord’s Table.

The Purging of Leaven

An important part of Passover preparation was the purging of leaven. In Exodus 12:15, we read: “Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread. On the first day you shall remove leaven from your houses. For

whoever eats leavened bread from the first day until the seventh day, that person shall be cut off from Israel.” Moses tells the people that the reason for the purging of leaven was to memorialize the understanding that it was God’s power that saved them (Ex 13:1-10). The “puffing up” of leaven had no place at the Passover table.

As the Twelve reflected on the purging of leaven, I expect that they recalled how Christ had used the concept of leaven in his teaching. In Luke 12:1-2, Christ speaks of the “leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. Nothing is covered up that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known.” The appearance of piety that masked the elevation of self over God was simple self-deception: “Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying: ‘These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me. And in vain they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men’” (Matt 15:7-9).

Paul understood the foundational role that Passover played in the Lord’s Supper; hence, his exhortation to spiritually prepare for the Lord’s Supper in the same way that we would for the Passover: “...purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Cor 5:7-8). The Pharisees’ leaven precludes the real self-examination at the Lord’s Table that Christ demands (1 Cor 11:28-29).⁹

Coming Hungry to the Lord’s Table

In Jesus’ time, it was the custom to fast during the day of Passover so that participants would be hungry when coming to the meal¹⁰.

⁹ At this point, perhaps some readers are wondering whether I am going to suggest that the Bread at the Lord’s Table must be unleavened. Both leaven and unleavened options can be argued for with Biblical evidence. The point is to not contend with each other about which is “right”. I agree with the wise counsel of one writer who said, “We conclude, therefore, that the quality of the bread matters not, so that we eat it in purity and truth, discerning the Lord’s body.” (John Thomas, *Herald of the Kingdom*, 1856)

¹⁰ The remnant of this practice is preserved in the Passover Haggadah’s

Throughout his ministry, Jesus spoke of being spiritually “hungry” for God’s word. Before his birth, Mary spoke of this concept: “He has filled the hungry with good things” (Luke 1:53). In his time of trial in the wilderness, Christ established the principle: “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matt 4:4). Jesus taught: “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled” (Matt 5:6). In the synagogue at Capernaum, Christ said, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst” (John 6:35). As Paul’s reproof to the Corinthian ecclesia demonstrates (1 Cor 11:34), looking to satisfy physical hunger at the Lord’s Table misses the crucial spiritual point that Christ made throughout his teaching. The Lord’s Supper is a place to satisfy our spiritual hunger by partaking of the Bread of Life.

Water as a Sign of Family Preparation

Preparation for the Passover was a family event. Jesus tasks Peter and John with preparing the Passover for the “family” and they are given cryptic instructions: “A man carrying a jar of water will meet you as you enter the city. Follow the man to a house and tell the owner that the teacher has sent you there to prepare the Passover in the upper room” (Luke 22:10-12). Christ’s instructions were a subterfuge to ensure that those who sought to kill Christ would be stymied. This bit of “spycraft” also ensured that the Passover meal would be uninterrupted by Christ’s arrest, as Judas wasn’t able to inform the authorities where to pick up Jesus.

Typically, drawing water was a chore performed by women; therefore, a man carrying water would have been unusual. Peter and John following this man was an act of faith, trusting completely in their Master’s instructions. As they followed the man carrying water, it seems likely that Peter and John reflected on some of the ways that water figured into Christ’s teaching. John memorialized many of these teachings in his gospel:

- The jars of water turned into wine at Cana (John 2).

opening words: “Let all who are hungry come and eat.”

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- The discussion with Nicodemus, where Christ said that one had to be born of water and spirit (John 3).
- The Samaritan woman at the well (John 4).
- The discourse on the “living water” that only Jesus could provide (John 7).

We recognize the essential role that water has played in our preparation for participating in the Lord's Supper. Our acknowledgment that Christ is the only “name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12) has led us to be born again through the waters of baptism. Immersion in water, after a good confession of faith, makes us a part of God's family.

Preparing the Passover Lamb

Peter and John were also responsible for obtaining the Passover lamb. Alfred Edersheim provides a vivid portrait of what obtaining the lamb looked like¹¹:

- In the early afternoon (about 1:30 p.m.), Peter and John would have joined the throng of Passover pilgrims and ascended to the Temple Mount.
- They would have seen the tremendous level of organization and staffing (i.e., priests and Levites) that enabled so many lambs to be sacrificed. Josephus states that 256,500 lambs were sacrificed at the Passover celebration of A.D. 66
- Those offering sacrifice were admitted in three groups within the Court of the Priests. Given the many things that Peter and John needed to do, Edersheim suggests that they would have been in the first group.
- The priests' trumpets sounded three times to indicate that the lambs were being killed.
- While the lambs were being killed, the Hallel Psalms (i.e., Psa 113-118) were being chanted by the priests and Levites.

¹¹ Alfred Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (McLean: Macdonald, n.d.)

- Either Peter or John would have killed the lamb by slitting its throat.
- The priests caught the blood from the dying lamb in a golden bowl, then handed it to another, receiving in return an empty bowl, and so the blood was passed on to the Great Altar.
- Like the other offerers, Peter and John would have chanted aloud, "Save now, I beseech Thee, Lord; O Lord, I beseech Thee, send now prosperity. Blessed be He that cometh in the Name of the Lord."
- The lamb was then placed on staves, which rested on Peter and John's shoulders, and subsequently flayed and cleansed.
- Peter and John would have then carried the lamb to the upper room (Luke 22:12), where it would have been spit-roasted.

We can readily see the impact that these preparations would have had on Peter and John. They would have thought about the Master's triumphant entry into Jerusalem when people's chants echoed the chants happening during the sacrifice. When they celebrated the Lord's Supper that evening, the singing of the Hallel Psalms would have had a poignant resonance as they reflected on Christ's discussion of his own death. Peter's first recorded meeting with Christ is in the context of John the Baptist's proclamation of him as the sacrificial Lamb of God (John 1:26, 39). In 1 Peter 1:13-19, Peter uses the language of Passover preparation to exhort us. In verse 13, he tells us to "gird up the loins of your mind", an allusion to the commandment for eating the Passover in a "ready" state of mind (Ex 12:11). In particular, Peter's memory of the blood pouring from the lamb's neck is echoed in "you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."

More than any other New Testament writer, John characterizes Christ as the "Lamb of God". In John's gospel, John the Baptist introduces Christ as a sacrificed lamb (known as *amnos* in Greek): "Behold! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!" (John 1:26). This concept is reinforced when John the Baptist introduces Christ to Peter and Andrew: "Behold the Lamb of God!" (John 1:36). In Revelation,

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"Lamb" is the most frequent title accorded to Christ. It is difficult to overemphasize the depth with which John understood Christ to be the Lamb of God; he refers to Christ as the Lamb twenty-nine times in Revelation.

Preparation as a Collective Act

We have seen how preparation for Passover was everyone's responsibility. Individually, one purged the leaven and came hungry to the meal. However, we have seen that there is collective responsibility for preparation; for example, John and Peter prepared the lamb for the whole group. It is also important to note that Christ's Passover celebration was made possible by the work of a nameless disciple, who ensured that the upper room was available and that all the required materials were present. We know that Jesus celebrated the Passover in the Upper City (the wealthy part of town) because only a wealthy home would have had an upper room. Many of the priestly class had homes here, including Caiaphas. This proximity explains why Judas could move so quickly to find the high priest; he was already in the neighborhood. The provision of the upper room was a significant gift, as the multitudes attending Passover made any available space very precious and difficult to obtain. Today, when we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we recognize that it is the result of many "nameless" disciples who do the hard but frequently underappreciated work of planning, organizing, scheduling, and preparing the Bread and Cup.

Our Preparation for the Lord's Supper

Our preparations for the Lord's Supper are informed by the preparations for the Passover. The first step is the recognition that preparation is a requirement. Our participation in the Lord's Supper doesn't start on Sunday morning; it begins well before we eat of the Bread and drink of the Cup. We should be reflecting on, preparing for, and looking forward to the Lord's Supper throughout the week. We should be hungry for the opportunity to meet together to remember our Lord.

It is important to realize that there are a wide variety of experiences

that characterize the time immediately prior to participating in the Lord's Supper. Some have long drives; some meet in their own homes and don't have any travel time. Some have the opportunity to create a "family feeling" by seeing their brothers and sisters prior to partaking of the Bread and Cup; others are participating "virtually". Whatever our conditions, our preparations must be focused on eliminating the spiritual leaven in our lives, appreciating the preciousness of the sacrifice made for us, and thanking God for making us a part of His family.

CHAPTER FOUR

Celebrating “This Passover”

“When the hour had come, He sat down, and the twelve apostles with Him. Then He said to them, ‘With fervent desire I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.’”

(Luke 22:14-15)

Since Christ wants us to keep the Lord's Supper with Passover in mind, it is incumbent upon us to explore what our Lord's celebration with the Twelve would have been like and what lessons we can learn. The current celebration of Passover differs in many ways from the one that Christ participated in with the Twelve. Since the Temple was destroyed in A.D. 70, the Passover format (Seder) has been altered several times. However, we do know, from Rabbinic writings (e.g., Hillel, Gamaliel, Mishnah Pesachim, etc.), exactly what Jesus' first-century Palestine Seder looked like.

The Passover Seder in the First Century

From combining the historical and Biblical records, we know the format of the Passover celebrated by Christ on the night in which he was betrayed:

Preliminary Course	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Blessing for occasion and drinking the first cup (<i>Kaddesh</i>, or "Sanctification") -First washing of hands -The dish of green herbs
Time for Teaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Sharing the Passover story -Questions and responses -Singing Psalms 113 and 114 -Blessing and drinking the second cup (<i>Maggid</i>, or "Proclamation")
Main Course	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Second washing of hands -Blessing for bread -Dipping of bread -Creation of the sop (sandwich of roasted lamb, unleavened bread, <i>harosheth</i>) by the Host -Distribution of the sop -Eating the meal -Blessing and drinking the third cup (<i>Barech</i>, or "Blessing") -Blessing for the meal
Conclusion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Third washing of hands -Singing Psalms 115 to 118 -Blessing and drinking the fourth cup (<i>Nirtzah</i>, or "Finished")

Let's explore the aspects of Christ's Passover in order to impact our own practice of celebrating the Lord's Supper.

Beginning the Meal

Jesus starts the meal with a remarkable statement. He says that he literally "lusted" (*epithumia*) to eat the Passover with the Twelve before his crucifixion: "With desire [*epithumia*] I have desired [*epithumeo*] to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:15 KJV). The New King James Version renders this, "With fervent desire I have desired to

eat this Passover" (Luke 22:15). Strong¹² defines *epithumia* as "a longing, especially for what is forbidden"; the King James Version translates this as "lust" thirty-three times. English Biblical scholar W.E. Vine (1873-1949)¹³, notes that "*epithumia* denotes 'strong desire' of any kind, the word is used of a good desire in Luke 22:15; Phil 1:23, and 1 Thess 2:17 only. Everywhere else, it has a bad sense."

Jesus' word choice demonstrates how important the institution of the Lord's Supper was to him. Christ knew that the meal with the Twelve would be difficult; he knew that Judas would betray him, that Peter would deny him, and that the disciples would resume their ongoing contention regarding the greatest among them. Despite these painful interactions, Jesus wanted with all his heart to be at the table with his disciples. At a time when the shadow of the cross lay heavy across his shoulders, coming together with his disciples to establish a time of celebration and remembrance provided much needed light in a very dark time. If Christ eagerly looked forward to partaking of the Bread and Cup, despite all that he was about to suffer, then what should our attitude be?

The Four Cups of Passover

The Biblical symbol of the cup is so profound that I have devoted three other chapters to this topic¹⁴. Jesus' Passover celebration had four cups. These cups were viewed as so essential that Rabbinical writings asserted that all participants, regardless of their economic status, had to have four cups at Passover. One Rabbinical source stated that even the poorest had to have "at least four cups, though he were to receive the money for it from the poor's box", while another adds that one "must sell or pawn his coat, or hire himself out for these four cups of

¹² James Strong, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2009)

¹³ W.E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Iowa Falls: World Bible, 1981).

¹⁴ Perhaps some readers are wondering if I will suggest a definitive answer to the perennial question: "One cup or many cups?" One cup, many cups (or any combination thereof) doesn't matter. Although the symbolism of one cup is important, there would have been multiple cups at the first Lord's Supper, and the Biblical record specifically mentions two cups (see the chapter entitled "The Marriage Supper of the Lamb").

wine.”

The four cups had a strong foundation. Each of them was connected to an "I will" statement found in Exodus 6:6-8:

First Cup (<i>Kaddesh</i>) “Sanctification”	“I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians.”
Second Cup (<i>Maggid</i>) “Proclamation”	“I will rescue you from their bondage.”
Third Cup (<i>Barech</i>) “Blessing”	“I will redeem you with an outstretched arm...”
Fourth Cup (<i>Nirtzah</i>) “Finished”	“I will take you as My people...”

The “I wills” embody God’s promises and the everlasting covenant. This Hebrew phrase signifies YHWH’s assured divine intent and promise to fully rescue and redeem His people from Egyptian bondage and slavery.

This rich imagery, referenced with each cup, explains the context of Christ’s discourse in John 15:1-8. Christ asserts that he is the “true vine”, to which we are connected as branches. The fundamental purpose of our connection to the vine is to bear fruit, and the Lord’s Supper provides an opportunity both to celebrate the true vine and to assess our fruitfulness.

Each cup had a prayer: "Blessed are you, God, King of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine." The image of the vine is rich in Biblical echoes. The vine represents both God’s people and God’s Son:

You have brought a vine out of Egypt;
 You have cast out the nations and planted it.
 You prepared room for it,
 And caused it to take deep root,
 And it filled the land...
 Return, we beseech You, O God of hosts;
 Look down from heaven and see,
 And visit this vine
 And the vineyard which Your right hand has planted,
 And the branch that You made strong for Yourself...
 Let Your hand be upon the man of Your right hand,

Upon the son of man whom You made strong for Yourself. (Psa 80:8-17)

The First Cup: Kaddesh (Sanctification)

The first cup, called *Kaddesh* ("sanctification"), was taken up by Jesus: "Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, 'Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes'" (Luke 22:17-18). As noted above, Christ's reference to the "fruit of the vine" is a natural connection to the prayer offered for the cup, "Blessed are you God, King of the universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine."

The first cup is included in the account of the Lord's Supper to emphasize that partaking of the Bread and Cup is reserved for those sanctified through baptism into Christ. The first cup is built upon God's promise to "bring out" His people (Exod 6:6), separating them and thus making them holy.

The Second Cup: Maggid (Proclamation)

The second cup occurred during the "teaching time" of the Passover meal. Exodus 12:25-27 shows that a key part of the Passover celebration was proclaiming the story of God's redemptive work. This was a time of intergenerational teaching, questions, and answers. It was a time to tell the story of God's family.

The Apostle Paul's teacher, Gamaliel, stated that, at a minimum, the teaching must include the meaning of the lamb, the unleavened bread, and the bitter herbs. Gamaliel¹⁵ also stated that the teaching must focus on the joy at the individual and collective redemption that Passover engenders:

In every generation, a man must so regard himself as if he came forth himself out of Egypt, for it is written: "And you shall tell your son in that day, saying, 'It is because of that which the Lord did for me when I came out of Egypt'" (Exod 13:8). Therefore, we are bound to give

¹⁵ Quoted in Brant Pitre, *Jesus and the Jewish Roots of the Eucharist: Unlocking the Secrets of the Last Supper* (New York: Crown, 2011).

thanks, to praise, to glorify, to honor, to exalt, to extol, and to bless him who wrought all these wonders for our father and for us. He brought us out from bondage to freedom, from sorrow to gladness, and from mourning to a feast day, and from darkness to great light, and from slavery to redemption; so let us say before him the Hallelujah!

Paul was alluding to the Maggid when he wrote that “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes” (1 Cor 11:26). Gamaliel’s list—to give thanks, to praise, to glorify, to honor, to exalt, to extol, to bless—powerfully describes how we can proclaim the Lord’s death at the Lord’s Supper. In the chapter entitled “Showing the Lord’s Death”, we explore this concept in detail.

The Third Cup: Barech (Blessing)

The third cup was taken after the main course; therefore, it was here that Jesus institutionalized the Cup as a fundamental part of the Lord’s Supper. Paul confirmed this fact in 1 Corinthians 10:16: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion [*koinonia*] of the blood of Christ?” This cup corresponded to God’s statement, “I will redeem you with an outstretched arm”, and in the chapter entitled “The Symbol of the Cup”, we explore in some detail the richness of Scripture’s connections between cup and blessing.

The Fourth Cup: Nirtzah (Finished)

The final cup brought the Passover meal celebration to a close. This cup is strongly aligned with the last few Hallel Psalms (115-118), whose singing immediately preceded it. Right after this cup, Jesus left the upper room and began his time of great trial, beginning with his first stop in Gethsemane. The time of trial culminated on the cross, where we see an echo of this fourth cup:

After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished and that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, “I thirst!” Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there, and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on hyssop, and put it to His mouth. So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, “**It is finished.**” (John 19:28-30, **my emphasis**)

This cup is founded on God's statement: "I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God", and we fix our eyes on Jesus as the "finisher" of this process: "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb 12:2 KJV).

Between the First and Second Cups: Telling the Passover Story

Like all Passover celebrants, Christ and the Twelve would have embraced the fundamental meaning of Passover. The meal was designed to teach (and re-teach) everyone in His family that God saved His children: "And it shall be, when your children say to you, 'What do you mean by this service?' that you shall say, 'It is the Passover sacrifice of the Lord, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households'" (Exod 12:26-27).

Passover was observed as a family unit, and it celebrated God's deliverance of the "house". Here the rhetorical structure "metonymy of containment" is used; "house" doesn't mean the structure, it means the people who live in the structure¹⁶. Technically, Jesus and the Twelve should have been eating the Passover with their families. For example, Jesus (as the oldest living male in Mary's "house") should have been leading the Passover for his natural family, who customarily made the trip from Galilee.

In his institution of the Lord's Supper, Jesus was essentially creating a new family set apart for God. Paul expands on this reality, our reality:

For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as sons, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs-heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. (Rom 8:15-17)

Passover is also a celebration of freedom. The writer to the Hebrews expands on our reality of being freed from the dominion of sin

¹⁶ The early ecclesia met in homes, further emphasizing the Passover-like "family feeling" of the Lord's Supper (Acts 2:46; Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19; Col 4:15; Phile. 1:2).

personified as the devil: "Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery" (Heb 2:14-15). Just as Passover is the celebration of being saved from death, the Lord's Supper is the celebration of Christ's saving work: "For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast" (1 Cor 5:7-8). The symbols on the Lord's Table are the symbols of life: "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:54).

We see that the Passover and the Lord's Supper have the same fundamental purpose:

Passover's Purpose	Lord's Supper Purpose
The celebration of a sanctified (set apart) family set free from slavery and saved from death	The celebration of a sanctified (set apart) family set free from slavery (to sin) and saved from death

The response to this salvation is joy. The first section of the Hallel Psalms (i.e., Psa 113 and 114) were sung after the sharing and discussion of the Passover story. The Talmud¹⁷ asserts that the singing at Passover should be so joyous that "the Hallel should burst through the roof of the house."

After the Second Cup: Washing, Bread, and the Sop

After the second cup, there was a second washing of hands. It seems that at this point, Jesus also washed the disciples' feet. The King James Version's rendering of John 13:2 ("supper being ended") is a mistranslation of the Greek word *ginomai*, which meant that the supper was ongoing. We also know that the foot washing could not have happened after supper because Judas was still present while it occurred. The foot washing was how Jesus began to address the most pressing issue for his disciples: their contentiousness and striving over

¹⁷ Babylonian Talmud. Tractate Pesachim: Chapter 7

who was the greatest. This was an ongoing debate throughout Jesus' ministry and tonight was no exception. It seems that it began when Judas took the "guest of honor" seat for himself, and then sometime during the discussion of the Passover story, the disciples' striving amongst each other escalated.

There is a recurring pattern throughout Christ's teaching: whenever Christ explicitly taught about his crucifixion, the disciples would respond by contending with each other as to who among them was the greatest. Luke 9:44-46 is illustrative:

"Let these words sink down into your ears, for the Son of Man is about to be betrayed into the hands of men." But they did not understand this saying, and it was hidden from them so that they did not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask Him about this saying. Then a dispute arose among them as to which of them would be greatest. (see also Mark 9:30-34)

The closer Christ came to the excruciating death of crucifixion on the cross, the more intense the striving became about who was the greatest. Even as Jesus made his way for the final time to Jerusalem—even as he took the time to share the excruciating details of his upcoming trials with the Twelve—his disciples were laser-focused on their own elevation:

Then He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them the things that would happen to Him: **"Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and to the scribes; and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him to the Gentiles; and they will mock Him, and scourge Him, and spit on Him, and kill Him. And the third day He will rise again."** Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying, **"Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask."** And He said to them, **"What do you want Me to do for you?"** They said to Him, **"Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory"...** And when the ten heard it, **they began to be greatly displeased with James and John.** But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your

servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many." (Mark. 10:32-45, **my emphasis**)

We can infer that the parallels between the Passover story and Christ's foretelling of his own sacrifice were so moving that the Twelve responded in their usual way—by contending with each other. As we will see in the chapter entitled "Who Is the Greatest?" a contentious spirit remains in some of the ways that we, as a community, approach the Lord's Supper.

Because he was a great teacher, Jesus starts with a concrete example to show the most important spiritual lesson that disciples learn: It is not about you. It is about God and His Son. Christ serves the Twelve by washing their feet, explicitly emphasizing that leadership entails service to others. However, the disciples remained resistant to Jesus' object lesson. For example, Peter insists on modifying Christ's actions. First, Peter refuses to accept Christ's act of service, and second, Peter tells Christ that the feet aren't enough (John 13:8-10). Peter wants to serve, but he wants to serve on his terms.

Peter refused to accept Christ's stark message of self-sacrifice. The depth of Christ's love for us, as embodied in his sacrifice, challenged Peter even before the final Passover:

From that time, Jesus began to show His disciples that He must go to Jerusalem, suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, be killed, and be raised on the third day. Then Peter took Him aside and began to rebuke Him, saying, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" But He turned and said to Peter, "Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men." (Matt 16:21-23)

We can stagger at the magnitude of God's and Christ's love for us. The Lord's Supper provides us with a time to stop and reflect on the sacrifice and the love that motivated it. Such reflection is the best antidote for our natural tendency to contend about who is the "greatest" amongst us.

From washing the disciples' feet, Jesus moved to the blessing for the bread recorded in Luke 22:19: "And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is My body which is given

for you; do this in remembrance [anamnesis] of Me.’” The bread is a powerful symbol, one that we will explore in depth in later chapters. The Septuagint uses anamnesis to refer to both Passover and the Bread of the Presence. Part of the “remembrance” for this part of the Passover celebration was the declaration that God provides bread; the blessing for the bread was: “Blessed are you, O Lord our God, King of the universe, who brings forth bread from the earth.”

After the bread was dipped, the leader of the Passover celebration then created and distributed the “sop” for each participant. We know precisely what the sop was. Edersheim¹⁸ and other commentators assert that the use of the definite article with “sop” means that Christ employed the “sop” defined by Hillel¹⁹, which was a kind of sandwich consisting of a piece of the lamb, a piece of unleavened bread, some bitter herbs, wrapped together, and dipped in the *harosheth*. Christ then gave the sop to all the participants, beginning with the one sitting in the place of honor (in this case, Judas Iscariot). It is interesting to note that although the Greek word for “sop” is used only in John 13, a close derivative is used in Ruth 2:14 (Septuagint) to describe the actions of the kinsman-redeemer. Boaz expresses kindness to Ruth and states, “Come, eat with us. Have some bread and dip it in the sauce” (Ruth 2:12 CEV). Given Christ’s status as the antitype of the kinsman-redeemer, it is only fitting that we would see echoes of this role at the Lord’s Supper.

The Final Parts of the Meal: the Third and Fourth Cups, the Second Part of the Hallel Psalms (Psa 115-118)

The main course component of the Passover celebration was brought to a close with the third cup (*Barech*, or “Blessing”) and a prayer for the meal. The “cup after supper” (Luke 22:20) was this cup: “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?” (1 Cor 10:16). From there, the celebrants would have sung Psalms 115 to 118. This portion of the Psalms is replete with poignant foreshadowing of Christ’s upcoming ordeal:

¹⁸ Alfred Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (McLean: Macdonald, n.d.)

¹⁹ Hillel’s sandwich”, haggadot.com

Christ's Last Day	Psalms 115–118 Foreshadowing
Sacrificial death	<p>"God is the Lord, and He has given us light; bind the sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar" (118:27).</p> <p>"The pains of death surrounded me, and the pangs of Sheol laid hold of me" (116: 3).</p> <p>"Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints" (116:15).</p>
Prayer and the promise of resurrection	<p>"For You have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, and my feet from falling. I will walk before the Lord in the land of the living" (116:8-9).</p> <p>"I called on the Lord in distress; the Lord answered me and set me in a broad place. The Lord is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?" (118:5-6)</p> <p>"I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord. The Lord has chastened me severely, but He has not given me over to death" (118:17-18).</p> <p>"The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone" (118:22).</p>
The corrupt Jewish and Roman trials	<p>"I believed, therefore I spoke, and 'I am greatly afflicted.' I said in my haste, 'All men are liars'" (116:10-11).</p>
Mary at the foot of the cross	<p>"O Lord, truly I am Your servant; I am Your servant, the son of Your maidservant; You have loosed my bonds" (116:16).</p>
The symbolic "cup" of Christ's sacrifice as a kind of thanksgiving offering	<p>"What shall I render to the Lord for all His benefits toward me? I will take up the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows to the Lord now in the presence of all His people... I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows to the Lord now in the presence of all His people" (116:12-14, 17-18).</p>

Thus, the final portion of the Hallel Psalms functioned as a bridge between the institution of the Lord's Supper and the crucifixion. These Psalms connect the symbol of the Lord's Supper and the sacrifice of Christ. The best example of this is the "cup of salvation". Christ had just established the cup as a memorial symbol, and now they were singing together, "I will take up the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord. I will pay my vows to the Lord now in the presence

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of all His people.” After the Psalms, Jesus would have brought the Passover celebration to a close with the fourth cup (*Nirtzah*, or “Finished”).

Lessons from Passover: Our Practice of the Lord’s Supper

The fact that Christ built the Lord’s Supper on the foundation of Passover has many lessons for us and therefore has many implications for our own participation in the Bread and the Cup. Specifically, our understanding of the Lord’s Supper is impacted in terms of the five P’s: preparation, participants, purpose, process, and perspective.

	Passover	Lord’s Supper
Preparation	Leaven is purged, preparations are made, the lamb is sacrifice, and individuals arrive at the table “hungry”.	Leaven of the Pharisees purged, deliberate preparation, honoring Christ’s sacrifice, hungry for fellowship with God, His Son, and each other.
Participants	Family of God, connected to God by covenant.	Family of God, connected to God by covenant.
Purpose	To remember God’s salvation from slavery and death.	To remember God’s salvation from slavery to sin and death
Process	Telling (i.e., “proclaiming”) the story of salvation, sharing in discussion.	Proclaiming the story of salvation through the Lord’s death.
Perspective	Loins girded, overflowing joy.	Loins girded, overflowing joy.

Like Paul, we must view the Lord’s Supper through the lens of the Passover feast: “Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Cor 5:7-8).

SECTION TWO

Powerful Symbols

CHAPTER FIVE	This is My Body
CHAPTER SIX	The Symbol of the Cup
CHAPTER SEVEN	The “Blood of Grapes”
CHAPTER EIGHT	The Symbol of the Bread
CHAPTER NINE	The Bread of the Presence
CHAPTER TEN	The Peace Offering

CHAPTER FIVE

This is My Body

“And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’”

(Luke 22:19)

The symbol of Christ's body is very familiar to us because the idea is so well established in Scripture (1 Cor 12, Rom 12:4, Eph 4:4-16, Eph 5:22-33, Col 1:18). Christ introduces the disciples to a symbolic understanding of his body right at the start of his public ministry (John 2:18-22). The disciples, with the sole exception of Mary, didn't understand Christ's teaching about his body until they witnessed his resurrected form. Christ acknowledged Mary's unique understanding by interpreting her devotion to him as symbolically preparing his body for death (Mark 14:8). Indeed, when Christ said, “This is my body,” the Twelve would have naturally thought of Mary's anointing, which their Master said would be remembered wherever the Gospel was preached (Mark 14:9). Therefore, Christ's statement at the Lord's Supper—“This is my body”—consolidates and extends his teaching about his body as a symbol. Following Christ's example, Paul and other New Testament writers expand upon the symbol of his body.

The Body (Soma)

The Greek word translated “body” in the New Testament is *soma*.

Strong's defines *soma* in this way²⁰: “the body (as a sound whole), used in a very wide application, literally or figuratively—bodily, body, slave.” The word is derived from *sozo*, a vitally important Scriptural word that means “to save, to heal, to make whole”. Fundamentally, *soma* has the idea of “wholeness”. *Soma* is used frequently throughout the New Testament, from the Gospels to Revelation.

Christ uses *soma* in relation to his own body:

- “Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.’ Then the Jews said, ‘It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?’ But He was speaking of the temple of His body. Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said” (John 2:19-22).
- “For in pouring this fragrant oil on My body, she did it for My burial. Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her” (Matt 26:12-13).

Christ's body also figures prominently at the end of the Gospels; the disciples attempted to honor it, and the religious leaders guarded it in an attempt to prove that he was not the Messiah. For all parties, the missing body in the tomb was irrefutable evidence that Jesus was indeed the Messiah, evidence that restored the faith of the disciples despite the rulers' attempts to deny the fact of the resurrection. Christ's resurrected body was the proof that he was alive: “Do not be unbelieving, but believing” (John 20:27). Today we have the chance to provide irrefutable evidence that Christ's body is alive by loving the other members of the body: “By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:35). We sometimes forget that the Head of the Body has told us that loving each other is the best evidence to show that the body is alive. In this time when the number of members in the body is declining, we all do well to remember the power of the Head's command to love one

²⁰ James Strong, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2009)

another. This command is especially relevant when there are perceived differences in the body. In his interaction with those at Corinth who disagreed with him, Paul foregrounds the body of Christ by “always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body” (2 Cor 4:10).

Flesh (Sarx) and Body (Soma) at the Breaking of Bread

In John 6, Christ stated that his flesh (*sarx* in Greek) was the bread that provided life. At the Lord’s Supper, Christ states that his body (*soma*) is the bread. The table below shows how these two statements are connected:

Christ’s Flesh as Bread	Christ’s Declaration	Christ’s Body as Bread
(John 6:51) “I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and <u>the bread that I shall give is My flesh</u> , which I shall give for the life of the world.”	(Luke 22:19) “And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘ <u>This is My body which is given for you</u> ’; do this in remembrance of Me.”	(1 Cor 10:16-17) “The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For us, though many, are <u>one bread and one body</u> ; for we all partake of that one bread.”

As indicated above, the common elements are bread, being given, and life. Paul brings *sarx* and *soma* together to describe Christ’s redemptive work: “And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled in the body [*soma*] of His flesh [*sarx*] through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight” (Col 1:21-22). The instrument for reconciliation was the one body on the cross, which created one group (Eph 2:16).

The Body: Crucified, Buried, Raised, and Made Alive Through Baptism

Paul writes that “we were all baptized into one body” (1 Cor 12:13). We are part of Christ’s body if we have symbolically shared the experience with Christ of being crucified, buried, raised, and made alive. Paul

provides the foundation for this concept in Romans 6:

- Baptism in Christ is symbolically relating us to his death (Rom 6:3) and the manner of his death (Rom 6:6).
- Our baptism means that we have symbolically been buried with Christ (Rom 6:4).
- Symbolically, we have been raised through baptism (Rom 6:4-5).
- By being baptized into Christ, we have symbolically been made alive with Christ (Rom 6:4, 8, 10).

Through baptism, we are all equal members of the body (1 Cor 12:13). Our baptism is a singular thing, interwoven with the singular body, spirit, Lord, and faith (Eph 4:4-5). Like circumcision, baptism is the sign of a covenant made by a change in the body:

In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses. (Col 2:11-13)

Paul tells us that baptism makes us a part of the body of Christ and enables us to come to the Lord's Table.

Christ: the Head of the Body

Paul makes it clear that Christ is the head of the body, "And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the pre-eminence" (Col 1:18). As the head, Christ is the body's savior (literally, "the one who makes whole"), and he is the source of all the body's growth and health (Col 2:19; Eph 4:15-16). We have an outstanding example of recognizing the head: when Mary anointed Christ at Bethany, she paid special attention to his head; "a woman came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard. Then she broke the flask and poured it on His head" (Mark 14:3). Devotion to the head is characterized by a

willingness to give all. Mary gave all that she had in her service to Christ. Mary's flask didn't have a stopper; once she broke the seal, all of the contents had to be used.

There are many shadows of the head symbol in the Old Testament that are fulfilled through their connection to the body of Christ. Paul makes this point in his writing to the Colossians when he states that the Mosaic ordinances are shadows, but the reality is the body of Christ: "...which are a shadow of the coming things, but the body [*soma*] is Christ's" (Col 2:17 DLNT).

Members of the Mosaic priesthood were anointed on the head (Exod 29:7) as were the kings of Israel (1 Sam 16:12-13). As God's anointed (Psa 2), Christ (literally, the "anointed one") is both Priest and King (Heb 7). In his description of Christ as the Head, Paul alludes to a fundamental verse that describes Christ's saving work: "And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all" (Eph 5:22-23). The images of "head" and "feet" are a deliberate echo of Genesis 3:15, "And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel." As our head, Christ crushed sin's head under his foot.

Christ is our sacrifice and our head. This was foreshadowed in the Mosaic Law when those making offerings placed their hands on the heads of the sacrifices (e.g., Lev 4:1-4; Lev 8:18-21). In emphasizing the superiority of Christ's sacrifice in relation to the Mosaic sacrifices, the writer to the Hebrews uses the symbol of the body: "...we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb 10:10). The writer supports this assertion by quoting from Psalm 40: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure" (Heb 10:5-6). It is interesting to note that while this quotation is from the Septuagint, the Hebrew is different, as indicated by the table below:

Psalm 40:6 (Hebrew Old Testament)	Psalm 40:6 (Greek Old Testament)
"Sacrifice and offering You did not desire; My ears You have opened. Burnt offering and sin offering You did not require."	"Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, but a body You have prepared for Me. In burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin You had no pleasure."

Although the Hebrew and Greek make different lexical choices, the meaning is the same because both languages evoke the image of a slave bound and devoted to his master for life. "Slave" is one meaning of *soma* (e.g., Rev 18:13); the piercing of the ear is the sign under the Mosaic Law of a slave who voluntarily chooses to serve his master for life (Deut 15:16-17). By sharing together in Christ's body through baptism, disciples are slaves to righteousness (Rom 6:18-19) and slaves to God: "Now you have been set free from sin, and you are God's slaves. This will make you holy and will lead you to eternal life" (Rom 6:22 CEV).

The Ecclesia as the One Body

Because we are as familiar with the metaphor of the ecclesia as the body of Christ, we run the risk of not fully appreciating the significance of this teaching. The teaching is ubiquitous, occurring with elaborate detail in several Pauline epistles, such as Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians. The elements of this teaching are consistently expressed:

- We are connected to Christ as the Head.
- We are connected to each other.
- God has purposefully arranged the body to have different members.
- We are different from each other in gifts.
- We are different from each other regarding the measure of our faith.
- Each member is valued and valuable.
- Anything that impacts one member impacts all members.

Sadly, some members in the Corinthian ecclesia had an incorrect conception of this fundamental teaching, which is why Paul devoted so much time to teaching about the one body and why he placed this teaching immediately following his instructions about the Lord's Supper.

The **incorrect** conception held by some in Corinth was diametrically opposed to the true teaching. Those **in error** at Corinth believed:

- We are not connected to Christ as the Head. Rather, we connect ourselves to a prominent member of the community as the Head (e.g., "I am of Paul" or "I am of Apollos" or "I am of Cephas")
- We are not connected to each other. Rather, we are so separate and independent that we partake of the Lord's Supper as individuals (e.g., "each one goes ahead with his own meal" 1 Cor 11:21 ESV)
- God does not arrange the members of the body. Rather, we can create a smaller body by tearing the body (literal meaning of "schism")
- Members should have the same gifts. All real members have the same valuable gifts (e.g., because I am not a hand, I am not of the body)
- Not every member is valued and valuable. Rather, some are not needed at all (e.g., eye saying to the hand, "I have no need of you")
- We are not impacted by things that happen to other members. Whether someone else suffers or is honored, that doesn't affect me.

We can see that this conception of the one body is not only incorrect, it is deadly. In Romans 14, Paul shows that our treatment of other members is a matter of life and death at the judgment seat of Christ. Christ has stated clearly that the way we treat each other impacts how we will be judged: "For with what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you" (Matt 7:2).

Most of the teaching about the one body is focused on how members

must treat each other, especially when there are closely held differences of opinion (e.g., 1 Cor 12). Let's use the "look-fors" that Paul has provided in Romans, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, and Colossians as an opportunity for reflection on how we are acting, individually and collectively, as the body of Christ. Are we:

- Humble with each other? (Rom 12:3, 16; Col 3:12)
- Loving and affectionate with each other? (Rom 12:9-10; 1 Cor 12:25; Eph 4:15-16; Col 3:14)
- Appreciative and respectful of others' differences? (Rom 12:4-5; 1 Cor 12:15-25; Eph 4:11-13)

In Colossians 3:12, Paul uses the metaphor of putting on a set of clothes to describe the mindset of those in the one body. When we come together as a body, we must be wearing "tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, and longsuffering." These clothes are made for action: "...bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do" (Col 3:13). These are the clothes that we wear to our thanksgiving, the Lord's Supper: "...be thankful... do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Col 3:15-17).

The One Body as the Temple

The Tabernacle/Temple was the center of public worship under the Mosaic Law. God told the people of Israel: "I will make my dwelling [literally, "tabernacle"] among you...And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people" (Lev 26:11-12). Paul quotes this passage to support his assertion that the ecclesia is "the temple of the living God" (2 Cor 6:16). Christ "tabernacled" with the disciples (John 1:14), and he is amongst the ecclesias now (Heb 2:12; Rev 1:13; Rev 2:1). One writer notes, "God chose to dwell among His wilderness people in the Tabernacle and with His nation through His presence in the Temple. Now, through Christ, He dwells individually and communally in His people."²¹ Since the ritual partaking of Christ's

²¹ Michael Ashton, *The Challenge of Corinthians* (Birmingham: CMPA, 2006/Electronic version 2018)

body is a key part of our public worship, it makes sense that his body would be symbolically connected to the temple of God.

Paul tells the Corinthian ecclesia that they—both collectively and individually—are the body of Christ and the temple of God:

- “Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are” (1 Cor 3:16-17).
- “Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ? Shall I then take the members of Christ and make them members of a harlot? Certainly not! Or do you not know that he who is joined to a harlot is one body with her? For ‘the two,’ He says, ‘shall become one flesh.’ But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him” (1 Cor 6:15-17).

In any building, the cornerstone provides horizontal and vertical alignment. So it is with Christ as the cornerstone (Eph 2:20); he aligns us individually with God and collectively with each other. Christ ensures that the elements of the body/temple are joined together (Eph 2:21; Eph 4:16).

The temple was also the place where sacrifices were made. Paul has this in mind when he states that it is only logical for us to realize that we need to offer living sacrifices (Rom 12:1). Peter builds on this logic (logikos, which only occurs in Rom 12:1 and 1 Pet 2:2) by emphasizing that our living sacrifices are made in a temple that is alive: “Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 2:4-5). The emphasis on life is striking; even the stones are alive. The body of Christ is alive, a point that is made repeatedly throughout the New Testament, beginning with the angel’s statement in the empty tomb: “Why do you seek the living among the dead?” (Luke 24:5).

The One Body as Bride of Christ

In some notable examples, Paul expounds on the idea of the body as

the bride of Christ. In 1 Corinthians 6, Paul connects the symbol of the body with the symbol of a bride and with that of a temple. Paul invokes the commandment of marriage (“the two shall become one flesh”) to show that a member of Christ’s body must not be joined to a “temple” prostitute. He goes on to remind his readers that the “real” temple is the one symbolically represented by Christ’s body. Paul closes his argument by reconnecting with the symbol of marriage, specifically the “bride price” (1 Cor 6:20).

In Ephesians 5, Paul elaborates on the symbol of the body as Christ’s bride. Christ does a variety of things for the body:

- He saves it, or makes it whole (verse 23)
- He loves the body (verse 25)
- He delivered himself for the body (verse 25)
- He makes the body holy (verse 26)
- He cleanses the body through baptism (verse 26)
- He presents the body as without spot, wrinkle, blemish (verse 27)
- He nurtures growth and development in the body (verse 29)

As he did in his letter to Corinth, Paul grounds his use of symbol in the institution of marriage by alluding to Adam’s statement (Gen 2:23) that Eve was flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone: “For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones” (Eph 5:30).

Sharing in the One Body

The bread is the symbol of our fellowship (*koinonia*) in the body of Christ (1 Cor 10:16). William Barclay²², notes that in the Greco-Roman world, *koinonia* meant “a close and intimate relationship into which people enter.” Early in his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul states that we enter this relationship by answering God’s call (1 Cor 1:9). Fundamentally, *koinonia* has the sense of “sharing”, and when used in relation to the one body, it denotes the relationship shared by God, Christ, and all those who have become part of the body through

²² William Barclay, *New Testament Words* (Westminster: John Knox, 2000)

baptism (1 John 1:3). Scripturally, this sharing can encompass suffering (Phil 3:10), material possessions (Rom 15:26; 2 Cor 9:13), the work of the gospel (Phil 1:5; Gal 2:9; Phm 1:6), a life of sacrifice (Heb 13:16), and the power of God in our lives (2 Cor 13:14; Phil 2:1).

Koinonia has two closely related words (*koinōnos* and *koinōneō*), which deepen our understanding of fellowship as sharing. *Koinōnos*, generally translated by the King James Version as “partner” or “partaker”, confirms that our sharing of trial is balanced by our sharing of comfort: “...we know that as you share in our sufferings, you will also share in our comfort” (2 Cor 1:7 ESV). This sharing will culminate, through God’s grace, in sharing the Divine nature: “...by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust” (2 Pet 1:4). Peter highlights that our sharing is accomplished through our participation in the covenants of promise.

Peter uses the verb form, *koinōneō*, to show that our sharing in suffering foreshadows our sharing in joy, “...rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy” (1 Pet 4:13). *Koinōneō* is also used to explain why our relationship with Christ is marked by his empathetic understanding of our struggles, “Inasmuch then as the children have partaken [*koinōneō*] of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared [*metecho*] in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil” (Heb 2:14). The equating of *koinōneō* and *metecho* brings us back to the sharing of the Lord’s Supper because *metecho* means to share by eating. Paul equates *koinonia* and *metecho*: “The bread which we break, is it not the communion [*koinonia*] of the body of Christ? For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake [*metecho*] of that one bread” (1 Cor 10:16-17). Eating the bread is a celebration of things shared.

Paul states that when we come to the Lord’s Table, “discerning the body” is essential (1 Cor 11:29)²³. God enables us to understand what it means to discern the Lord’s body through His provision of a rich

²³ The chapter entitled “Not Discerning the Lord’s Body” explores the consequences of not discerning.

array of symbols. We humbly acknowledge that God has called us to be part of the body and that He has arranged the parts of the body according to His will and purpose. We are joined to Christ and thus strive for holiness in our individual and collective lives. We celebrate the shared experience of symbolically being crucified, buried, raised, and made alive with Christ through baptism. We share in both a sacrificial death and a new life. We acknowledge Christ as our Head, from whom all growth and direction comes. We see other members as valued and essential. We glorify the Head by loving all the parts of the body. We are thankful that we, as partakers of the Bread, share the most important things in the world.

CHAPTER SIX

The Symbol of the Cup

“The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?”

(1 Cor 10:16)

Christ left us with two symbols of remembrance: the Bread and the Cup. In this chapter, we will focus on how the symbol of the cup functions as a foundation for understanding our salvation in Christ. “Judgment”, “redemption”, and “blessing” are essential components of our salvation accomplished through Christ who lifted up “the cup of salvation” (Psa 116:14 NIV) and invited us to partake of this cup.

Luke’s Account: The Cup is Doubled

In the institution of the Lord’s Supper, the idea of two cups is both mentioned explicitly (e.g., Luke 22:17, 20) and implied by Christ’s promise to drink it “new” in the Kingdom (Matt 26:27-29; Mark 14:23-25). The double mention of the cup is suggestive of the two cups that were an integral part of the betrothal/marriage process for Jews in the first century. The chapter entitled “The Marriage Supper of the Lamb” goes into some detail regarding this profound symbolism of Christ as the Bridegroom and the ecclesia as his Bride (Eph 5:22-32).

The double mention of the cup also suggests how the Scriptural meaning of “doubling” is connected to the symbolic meanings of the cup. Scripturally, “doubling” is associated with the redemptive process. This is true for individual trespasses (Exod 22:4, 7, 9); it is also used

collectively regarding the process of salvation, the restoration of a right relationship with God:

- “Speak kindly to Jerusalem and announce: Your slavery is past; your punishment is over. I, the Lord, made you pay double for your sins” (Isa 40:2 CEV).
- “As for you also, because of the blood of your covenant, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit. Return to the stronghold, you prisoners of hope. Even today I declare that I will restore double to you” (Zech 9:11-12).

Since salvation is the ultimate blessing, it is fitting that “doubling” is also associated with blessing. Here, too, the application is to individuals (Deut 21:17; 1 Sam 1:5; 2 Kings 2:9; Job 42:10) and to the salvation given to God’s family:

...but you shall be called the priests of the Lord; they shall speak of you as the ministers of our God; you shall eat the wealth of the nations, and in their glory you shall boast. Instead of your shame there shall be a double portion; instead of dishonor they shall rejoice in their lot; therefore in their land they shall possess a double portion; they shall have everlasting joy. (Isa 61:6-7 ESV)

By referring to the cup two times in his account of the Lord’s Supper, Luke opens the door to a powerful symbol of the elements of salvation: judgment, redemption, and blessing.

The Cup as a Symbol of Judgment

The cup is used as a symbol of judgment in the Old Testament, or as a means of discerning between righteousness and wickedness:

- “But God is the Judge: He puts down one, and exalts another. For in the hand of the Lord there is a cup, and the wine is red; it is fully mixed, and He pours it out; surely its dregs shall all the wicked of the earth drain and drink down” (Psa 75:7-8).
- “The Lord tests the righteous, but the wicked and the one who loves violence His soul hates. Upon the wicked He will rain coals; fire and brimstone and a burning wind shall be the portion of their cup” (Psa 11:4-6).

Testing, or trial, is the vehicle of discernment, and the cup is a symbol of trial. This symbolism is most powerfully expressed in Jesus' prayer in the Garden, where he is struggling with his most difficult trial: "He knelt down and prayed, saying, 'Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done'" (Luke 22:41-42). Jesus recognized the necessity of trial, reproving Peter for not understanding: "Put your sword into the sheath. Shall I not drink the cup which My Father has given Me?" (John 18:11). Similarly, James and John (and their mother) did not appreciate that trial is a prerequisite for salvation:

But Jesus answered and said, "You do not know what you ask. Are you able to drink the cup that I am about to drink, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They said to Him, "We are able." So He said to them, "You will indeed drink My cup, and be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with; but to sit on My right hand and on My left is not Mine to give, but it is for those for whom it is prepared by My Father." (Matt 20:22-23)

These lessons sank into the first century ecclesia; the idea of trial as a prerequisite for reigning with Christ in the kingdom became a first principle teaching (i.e., a "faithful saying"): "This is a faithful saying: 'For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him. If we endure, we shall also reign with Him'" (2 Tim 2:11-12).

The cup is also used as a symbol of judgment as "condemnation". There are several examples of this usage, notably:

For thus says the Lord God of Israel to me: "Take this wine cup of fury from My hand, and cause all the nations, to whom I send you, to drink it. And they will drink and stagger and go mad because of the sword that I will send among them." Then I took the cup from the Lord's hand, and made all the nations drink, to whom the Lord had sent me. (Jer 25:15-17)

Christ's trial, which he termed his "cup", was part of God's righteous condemnation of sin:

For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, on account of sin: He condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk

according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Rom 8:3-4)

By partaking of the cup just as Christ did, by sharing in his trials, we recognize God's judgment as part of the salvation process, "But when we are judged by the Lord, we are being corrected by discipline, so that we will not be condemned along with the world" (1 Cor 11:32 Mounce).

The Cup: Symbol of Redemption

The cup of judgment is also the cup of redemption. The Cup of Blessing was focused on redemption during the Passover and was celebrated with the statement remembering God's promise: "I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and great judgments" (Exod 6:6). The story from redemption from slavery in Egypt is of course the great type of redemption from sin and death. The symbolism of the cup begins the story of redemption from slavery in Egypt:

- The account in Genesis 40 shows Joseph correctly interpreting a dream about a cup of wine, which ultimately results in Joseph being redeemed from imprisonment and elevated to a position of leadership in Egypt. Joseph uses his position to save his family.
- In Joseph's plan of redemption, he strategically places the cup in Benjamin's bag, a ruse that causes Judah's act of self-sacrifice and results in Joseph's revelation of himself to his brothers.

Joseph is perhaps the most profound type of Christ found in Scripture, and nowhere is this more evident than in his submission to God's will: "God sent me before you to preserve a posterity for you in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you who sent me here, but God" (Gen 50:4-8).

God's motivation in redeeming His people from slavery, whether to Egypt or to sin, is twofold:

The Lord did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the Lord loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the Lord has brought

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you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. (Deut 7:7-8)

God redeems us because He loves us and because He keeps His promises, like the ones made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The work of the Son is redemption from slavery:

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. (Heb 2:14-15)

This redemptive work changes us from slaves to sons and heirs: "For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father'" (Rom 8:15). Paul brings together these thoughts about blessing, adoption, love, and redemption in his opening words to the Ephesian ecclesia:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ... having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace. (Eph 1:3-7)

The cup of blessing is the overflowing cup of redemption, given in love to God's sons and daughters.

The Cup: A Symbol of Blessing

Biblically, the cup symbolizes "blessing": "The cup of blessing [*eulogia*] which we bless [*eulogeo*], is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?" (1 Cor 10:16). Paul contextualizes the cup of the Lord's Supper as the third cup of Passover, which was called the "Cup of Blessing". Our thankfulness for all of God's blessings is the foundation for our participation in the Lord's Supper. The cup symbolizes the loving care that God gives us through His abundant gifts: "You anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over" (Psa 23:5). Even in our secular

society, the idea of our cup “running over” is synonymous with blessings in our lives. God has “blessed us with every spiritual blessing” (Eph 1:3). Peter reminds us that understanding our blessings impacts both our relationships with others and our own salvation:

“Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing” (1 Pet 3:8-9).

When we think of the Biblical echoes of “blessing”, we naturally think of the promises made to Abraham. Perhaps because we are so familiar with the verses, we fail to appreciate that the repetition of “blessing” is remarkable: “I will make you a great nation; I will bless you and make your name great; and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and I will curse him who curses you; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen 12:2-3).

Abraham is personally blessed; he will be a blessing to others; those who bless him will in turn be blessed by God. Most importantly, as confirmed by Genesis 22:18, all humanity is blessed by Abraham’s seed—Christ (Gal 3:16). Peter makes this very point to the religious leaders of his day, referring to Jesus’ redemptive work as a “blessing” that fulfills the blessings given to Abraham: “You are sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying to Abraham, ‘And in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’ To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities” (Acts 3:25-26).

Maybe the most significant Biblical echo occurs in Genesis 14, the first occurrence of the Bread and Wine together. Melchizedek meets Abraham on his return from the battle with the kings: “Then Melchizedek king of Salem brought out bread and wine; he was the priest of God Most High. And he blessed him and said: ‘Blessed be Abram of God Most High, Possessor of heaven and earth; and blessed be God Most High, who has delivered your enemies into your hand’” (Gen 14:18-20). In Hebrews 6:13-7:28, the writer connects the blessings given to Abraham with the work of Melchizedek as it is fulfilled in Christ. The writer to the Hebrews grounds our hope in the promises made to Abraham (Heb 6:13-18) and the ongoing work of

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Jesus as our “High Priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek” (Heb 6:20). Christ’s priesthood, after the order of Melchizedek, is superior to the Mosaic priesthood for many reasons, including the superiority of the covenant represented by the cup (Heb 7:20-22).

Taking the Cup of Salvation

How do we see the cup at the Lord’s Supper? We can see the cup as the embodiment of “blessing”, the goodness of God’s gifts, overflowing in our lives. We can see the blessings given to Abraham fulfilled in Christ, who has made us inheritors of those promises. We can see our redemption from slavery to sin and death and the ongoing work of the priest like unto Melchizedek. We can see God’s love that permeates all aspects of our redemption but also His righteous judgment on sinful flesh. We can see the trials that Christ endured and know that we are called to share in his trials, with thanksgiving. We can see that our approach to the Lord’s Table must be humble, reverent, and joyful.

When we take up the cup, we can see salvation, just as Christ did: “What shall I return to the Lord for all his goodness to me? I will lift up the cup of salvation and call on the name of the Lord. I will fulfill my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people” (Psa 116:12-14 NIV).

CHAPTER SEVEN

The “Blood of Grapes”

“My blood is drink indeed.”

(John 6:55)

As we explore the symbolic relationship between wine and the Lord's Supper, it is important to acknowledge that this relationship is implicit rather than explicit. Jesus talks about the “cup”, not the contents of the cup. Jesus uses a figure of speech termed metonymy. This metonym of containment is frequently used. For example, when you are asked to bring a “dish” for an ecclesial potluck dinner, you know that you are being asked to bring the contents of the dish, not an empty dish.

Underlying this rhetorical construction is the symbolism of wine representing blood. When Christ delivered his “hard” saying about drinking his blood, it was near Passover (John 6:4). Therefore, at Passover, when Christ said, “Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you” the Twelve would have immediately thought of that tense time in the Capernaum synagogue. When Christ stated, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood”, the Twelve would have remembered that this exact symbolism figured prominently in one of the blessings given to Israel by God: “wine, the blood of the grapes” (Deut 32:14). They also would have connected Christ's symbolic statement to a prophecy of the Messiah that also used wine as a representation of blood: “He washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes” (Gen 49:11).

Biblically, Christ is identified with every element of wine production: the vine, the harvest, and the wine press. He is associated with the bottling

of wine, and with its consumption. Christ began his public ministry by providing wine for a wedding feast, and his parables included vineyards and wineskins. On the night he was betrayed, Christ asserted that he was the True Vine, and his penultimate act was to take a sip of sour wine (John 19:30).

Christ and the Vine

During the institution of the Lord's Supper, Christ makes an explicit reference to wine as the "fruit of the vine" (Matt 26:29; Mark 14:25; Luke 22:18). This reference is more than a repetition of the traditional Passover blessings for the cup. The vine is an image that is strongly associated with Christ. It was prophesied that Messiah would bind "his foal to the vine and his donkey's colt to the choice vine" (Gen 49:11; c.f. Zech 9:9), a prophecy fulfilled in Christ's entry into Jerusalem (John 12:15). Psalm 80 describes the nation of Israel as a vine: "You have brought a vine out of Egypt" (verse 8). From this vine is the "branch" (Hebrew *ben*, usually translated as "son") that God made strong for Himself: "...the vineyard which Your right hand has planted, and the branch [*ben*] that You made strong for Yourself...Let Your hand be upon the man of Your right hand, upon the son of man whom You made strong for Yourself" (verses 15-17). Christ is that Son, that man of God's right hand.

In John 15, Christ takes up the imagery of Psalm 80: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser" (John 15:1). This discussion occurs right after the institution of the Lord's Supper; therefore, Christ is building on his teaching about cups, wine, and fruit of the vine. Christ establishes the foundation: God is the keeper of the vineyard, Christ is the vine, and we are the branches connected to the vine. From this foundation, Christ adds vital information:

- Our purpose as disciples is to "bear fruit"
- We can only bear fruit if we abide in Christ
- If a branch doesn't bear fruit, God removes it and destroys it
- To "abide" is to love.

When we partake of the fruit of the vine, we are invited to reflect on our discipleship. As we examine ourselves, we assess the fruit we are

bearing through Christ and the strength of our love, our “abiding”, for God and Christ.

Christ and the Vineyard

Scripture uses the image of the vineyard to describe God's relationship with His people. In 1 Chronicles 21, Ahab's unjust taking of Naboth's vineyard symbolized the evil king's lack of understanding and his desecration of God's people. To exchange a vineyard, which requires many years of effort to bear fruit, for a vegetable garden is like tearing down a beautiful house to put up a parking lot. Naboth says as much: “But Naboth said to Ahab, ‘The Lord forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers’” (1 Chr 21:3). In a scheme that foreshadows the false witnesses who accused Christ, Jezebel finds people to lie about Naboth, which leads to his execution. God is moved to condemn Ahab and Jezebel to death as a result of their actions regarding the vineyard. Isaiah 5 describes the loving care with which the owner of the vineyard built and tended the vineyard; verse seven emphatically declares what the parable means, “For the vineyard of the Lord of hosts is the house of Israel.”

Christ sets one of his most profound parables in a vineyard (Matt 21:33-44; Mark 12:1-11; Luke 20:9-16). In the parable, the owner of the vineyard puts a great deal of attention into building and nurturing the vineyard. He plants it, fences it, adds a winepress, and builds a tower. These are the same actions that God takes in Isaiah 5:1-3. Next in the story, the owner leases the vineyard to some tenants and travels far away. At harvest time, the owner sends servants to collect the fruit; the tenants violently expel the servants by beating and executing them. The owner sends more servants, with the same result. Finally, the owner sends his son because he believes that the son's status will protect him from the tenants. However, the tenants see the son as the heir to the vineyard; once the heir is removed, they reason, the vineyard will be their own inheritance. As in the account of Naboth, the conflict becomes all about the inheritance (1 Chr 21:3).

Biblically, the concepts of “heir” and “inheritance” relate to the members of God's family established through the covenants of promise. The heir is Christ, whom God appointed “the heir of all things”

(Heb 1:2). Through Christ's work, we become "fellow heirs" with him:

- "And if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him" (Rom 8:17).
- "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (Gal 3:29).
- "So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God" (Gal 4:7).
- "...so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:7).

As the confirmation of the covenants of promise, Christ's work provides an inheritance for us: "Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance" (Heb 9:15). Our inheritance is "glorious" (Eph 1:18), "imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven" (1 Pet 1:4).

The key problem for the tenants in the parable—and the religious leaders of Christ's day—is that they thought they owned the vineyard. Like Ahab and Jezebel, they sought to possess a vineyard that they had not built. Indeed, Christ tells his opponents their pride has precluded them from building anything (Psa 118:22-23). The Lord's Table provides a special opportunity for those leaders of God's family to renew their understanding that the vineyard is God's and that, in the language of the parable, they are workers, not owners. Paul reminds us of the right perspective: "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ" (Col 3:23-24).

Christ and the Winepress

Biblically, the winepress was a large stone vat where grapes were placed and subsequently pressed into juice by workers trampling them with their feet. The image of a man trampling grapes is used several times to describe Christ. First, Jacob foretells that Messiah will have clothes stained by wine and the blood of grapes: "...he has washed his

garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes" (Gen 49:11). The word translated "wash" is literally "to trample"; hence, the image is washing by treading underfoot, the same motion as used in a winepress.

When Christ returns, he will defeat the enemies of God in battle. The Scripture applies to Christ this imagery of harvesting, processing, and producing wine:

- "Put in the sickle, for the harvest is ripe. Go in, tread, for the winepress is full. The vats overflow, for their evil is great" (Joel 3:13).
- "Then another angel came out of the temple in heaven, and he too had a sharp sickle. And another angel came out...he called with a loud voice to the one who had the sharp sickle, 'Put in your sickle and gather the clusters from the vine of the earth, for its grapes are ripe.' So the angel swung his sickle across the earth and gathered the grape harvest of the earth and threw it into the great winepress of the wrath of God. And the winepress was trodden outside the city, and blood flowed from the winepress" (Rev 14:17-20).

This prophecy will be fulfilled in Christ's return and subjugation of the nations. Isaiah describes Christ's second coming as operating a winepress:

Who is this who comes from Edom, in crimsoned garments from Bozrah, he who is splendid in his apparel, marching in the greatness of his strength? "It is I, speaking in righteousness, mighty to save." Why is your apparel red, and your garments like his who treads in the winepress? "I have trodden the winepress alone, and from the peoples no one was with me; I trod them in my anger and trampled them in my wrath; their lifeblood spattered on my garments, and stained all my apparel... I trampled down the peoples in my anger; I made them drunk in my wrath, and I poured out their lifeblood on the earth." (Isa 61:1-6)

The same imagery is used in Revelation: "He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God...He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty" (Rev 19:13-15). We see the triumphant Christ, who flattens

the opposition so thoroughly that it is equated to pressing grapes by stepping on them in a winepress.

It is not a coincidence that Goliath—that prototypical enemy of God—was associated with the winepress. Goliath's hometown of Gath carries “the sense of treading out grapes, a winepress.”²⁴ Moreover, it has been suggested that the real title of Psalm 80 (which describes Messiah as a vine) is Gittith, which refers to a musical instrument from Gath²⁵.

Like Gath, Gethsemane has an underlying meaning related to a winepress. One commenter notes that Gethsemane literally means “winepress of oil”, stating: “The first part of the name ‘Gethsemane’ certainly means ‘winepress’, but strangely enough the rest of the word is Hebrew for ‘oil.’”²⁶ In this sense, the winepress is suggestive of Christ's victory over sin. It is this struggle against the enemy in which we are engaged; as one writer observed: “The Truth is like a winepress and the King is treading it. By his teaching and its effect in the disciples' lives, he makes them to be outwardly what they are inwardly.”²⁷

Christ and Wine

Throughout Scripture, wine is a signifier of rejoicing and happiness. Wine makes our hearts glad (Psa 104:15) and life “joyful” (Ecc 10:19 YLT). The redemption of Israel is likened to wine: “And their heart shall rejoice as if with wine. Yes, their children shall see it and be glad; their heart shall rejoice in the Lord” (Zech 10:7). There is also the idea that wine creates community between God and man; the parable of Judges 9 states, “But the vine said to them, ‘Should I cease my new wine, which cheers both God and men’” (Judg 9:13). Christ embraced this aspect of wine, and as a result, he was falsely accused of being a drunk. Jesus responds to the accusations directly: “The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, ‘Look, a glutton and a

²⁴ James Strong, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2009)

²⁵ J.W. Thirtle, *The Titles of the Psalms* (London: Frowde, 1904)

²⁶ H.A. Whittaker, *Studies in the Gospels* (Cannock: Biblia, n.d.)

²⁷ Dennis Gillette, *The Genius of Discipleship* (Birmingham: CMPA, 1984)

winebibber, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' (Luke 7:34).

Wine figured prominently in Christ's ministry. Christ began his public ministry with the miraculous production of the "good" wine at a wedding feast. Jesus also used the image of wineskins to teach that it was impossible to contain the "new wine" of his teaching inside the "old wineskins" of religious leaders' legalism: "Nor do they put new wine into old wineskins, or else the wineskins break, the wine is spilled, and the wineskins are ruined. But they put new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved" (Matt 9:17). The religious leaders refused to drink the new wine that the disciples consumed. As a result, they completely missed the powerful message of Pentecost, dismissing Christ's messengers as being "full of new wine" (Acts 2:13). They were indeed full of life-giving "new wine", but sadly, the religious leaders refused to drink.

Wine and milk are frequently used together in Messianic passages. Jacob's prophecy describes Christ as having eyes "darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk" (Gen 49:12). The Bridegroom in the Song of Solomon states, "I have drunk my wine with my milk" (Song 5:1). The kingdom is described in a similar way: "And it will come to pass in that day that the mountains shall drip with new wine, the hills shall flow with milk" (Joel 3:18). Similarly, God's word is described as priceless wine and milk: "Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price" (Isa 55:1). Although Christ has provided the wine at the Lord's Supper, we can bring a humble and childlike attitude, one that lays aside "malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking", one that is symbolized by "the pure milk of the word" (1 Pet 2:1-2).

Christ and the Drink Offering

The Mosaic Law used wine as a drink offering, a thing "poured out" (Num 28:7). The concept of an offering being "poured out" had special resonance for Paul:

- "Yes, and if I am being poured out as a drink offering on the sacrifice and service of your faith, I am glad and rejoice with you all. For the same reason you also be glad and rejoice with

me" (Phil 2:17-18).

- "For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Tim 4:6-8).

Paul emphasizes an important aspect of the drink offering. He shows that under the Mosaic Law, the drink offering is always complimentary to other sacrifices. Therefore, Paul tells the Philippians that his drink offering complements the "sacrifice and service" of their faith. Similarly, he tells Timothy that God's reward is a shared one, given to Paul and "all who have loved His appearing".

The concept of being "poured out" is also closely associated with Christ's sacrifice. The word translated by the King James Version as "shed" (*ekcheo*) is defined by Strong as "to pour out"²⁸, which is how that version usually translates this word. Christ evokes the image of the drink offering by stating that his blood was poured out for:

- Many (Matt 26:28; Mark 14:24)
- For the remission of sins (Matt 26:28)
- For those celebrating the Passover with Christ (Luke 22:20)

This image would have been dramatically reinforced for those at the foot of the cross who saw the blood and water pouring out of Christ's side (John 19:34).

The first occurrence of the drink offering predates the Mosaic Law and prefigures Christ in Gethsemane, whose sweat poured out like "great drops of blood falling down to the ground" (Luke 22:44). In Genesis 35, God changed Jacob's name to Israel in the context of reconfirming the covenants of promise. Jacob made an altar and poured out wine and oil, and then named the place Bethel (i.e., "House of God") because God spoke with him there. As we have seen, Gethsemane literally means "winepress of oil"; Jacob prefigures this by pouring out wine

²⁸ James Strong, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2009)

and oil. In Gethsemane, Christ pours out everything—his heart and soul, his deepest feelings and darkest fears—and God responds by sending angels to strengthen him. As we partake of the cup, we rejoice that we have a High Priest who understands so completely what it is like for us to pour out our hearts, our feelings, and our fears (Heb 4:14-16).

Christ and the Nazarite Vow

Any exploration of vines, grapes, and wine has to touch on the Nazarite vow (Num 6:1-21). The Nazarite (*nāzîr*) was separated (the word literally means “separated” or “consecrated”) to God by a vow, and one marker of this separation was complete abstinence from anything related to wine: “...he shall separate himself from wine and similar drink; he shall drink neither vinegar made from wine nor vinegar made from similar drink; neither shall he drink any grape juice, nor eat fresh grapes or raisins. All the days of his separation he shall eat nothing that is produced by the grapevine, from seed to skin” (Num 6:3-4).

John the Baptist was a Nazarite; the Lord Jesus Christ was not. The angel tells John’s father that the child to be born “shall drink neither wine nor strong drink” (Luke 1:13). I suggest that John’s status as a Nazarite was designed to help the people differentiate between his work and Christ’s. We know that some struggled with this differentiation. Herod thought Jesus was John risen from the dead (Matt 14:1-2), a belief that became commonplace (e.g., Matt 16:13-14). Christ’s ministry was very different from John’s; this was fitting because the Bridegroom’s presence was cause for celebration, not abstemiousness: “And He said to them, ‘Can you make the friends of the bridegroom fast while the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them; then they will fast in those days’” (Luke 5:34-35). Christ then elaborates on this difference by employing a parable about wine!

Although he was emphatically not a Nazarite during his ministry, Christ’s words and actions during the last hours of his life allude to some aspects of the Nazarite vow. When taking up the first cup, Christ states, “For I tell you that from now on I will not drink of the fruit of the

vine until the kingdom of God comes" (Luke 22:16 ESV). As he does partake of the second cup (i.e., the "Cup of Blessing"), as well as the sour wine immediately prior to his death (John 19:29-30), this appears to be a deliberate reference to the Nazarite vow rather than a literal statement. Similarly, Christ's initial refusal of the sour wine (Matt 27:34) portrays him as "the great antitypical Nazarite."²⁹

It is difficult to contemplate Christ in relation to the "separation" or the "consecration" or the "holiness" of the Nazarite without thinking of Hebrews 7:26, where all these adjectives are applied to Christ as our High Priest: "For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens." Christ is "holy" and "harmless" (i.e., innocent/guileless). The Nazarite could be defiled by many things, yet Christ is "undefiled". He is "separate"; as one commentator states, "He has been 'separated' from sinners; in his life he was separate in his conduct, but now he is altogether beyond the influence or power of men, for he has ascended higher than the heavens to the Father's presence."³⁰

"I Thirst"

One of Christ's final acts on the cross was to drink some sour wine. He did this in fulfillment of Psalm 69:21, "And for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink." The horrific ordeal of the last twelve hours of his life—being beaten, being scourged, being crucified—ensured that Christ was severely dehydrated. This condition was foretold by one of the Psalms that Christ was reciting on the cross: "My mouth is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death" (Psa 22:15 NIV). Someone at the foot of the cross ("they" in verse 29 seems to refer back to the group listed in verses 25-27) doused a sponge in sour wine, attached a hyssop stalk for a straw, and held it up for Christ. The image is powerful: Christ connected to a faithful disciple through wine and hyssop, the latter an instrument used to deploy the blood of Passover (Exod 12:22) and the blood of the covenant (Heb 9:19-20). Christ promised that our own

²⁹ R. Roberts, *The Law of Moses* (Birmingham: CMPA, 1987)

³⁰ John Carter, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Birmingham: CMPA, 1939/Electronic edition 2015)

thirst would be quenched (John 6:35) through his blood. In John 6:55, he states that his blood is *alethos* drink; that is, the drink is “real” or “true”. The wine in the cup is the herald of true things. It speaks of the true vine; it tells of the winepress, it declares a thing “poured out”, and it proclaims shared joy.

Drinking the Wine at the Lord's Table

When we take up the cup, look at, and consume its contents, what are we reflecting upon? Here are some suggestions for reflection:

- Do we come spiritually “thirsty” for the drink that is real and true?
- Do we appreciate the love and sacrifice embodied in this symbol of the covenant?
- Do we contemplate our connection to the True Vine?
- Do we embrace our roles as workers in the vineyard?
- Do we celebrate with joy Christ's victory over sin?
- Do we long for the time when Christ will set all things right by treading the winepress of judgment?
- Do we examine our hearts to see if we are “pouring out” our lives in sacrifice?

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Symbol of the Bread

“And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’”

(Luke 22:19)

By selecting the bread as a symbol, Christ chose an object with a complex and powerful set of meanings. In a Biblical context, bread symbolizes fellowship, relationship, and community. Bread is a symbol of life and of living; Christ is both the bread of life and the living bread. Bread, as embodied in the heavenly manna, represents God's care for His children. The many uses of grain and bread in the Mosaic Law show the importance of this symbol. Leaven (or the lack thereof) is a symbol that prompts reflection about our motivations and our hearts.

Bread Symbolizes Fellowship

Biblically, bread symbolizes the coming together in fellowship. The phrase “to eat bread” captures this idea of fellowship:

- “And Aaron came with all the elders of Israel to eat bread with Moses’ father-in-law before God” (Exod 18:12).
- “So David said to him, ‘Do not fear, for I will surely show you kindness for Jonathan your father’s sake, and will restore to you all the land of Saul your grandfather; and you shall eat bread at my table continually’” (2 Sam 9:7).
- “Then came to him all his brothers and sisters and all who had

known him before, and ate bread with him in his house. And they showed him sympathy and comforted him for all the evil that the Lord had brought upon him" (Job. 42:11 ESV).

- "Now when one of those who sat at the table with Him heard these things, he said to Him, 'Blessed is he who shall eat bread in the kingdom of God!'" (Luke 14:15).

Jesus uses the image of eating bread together to show the depths of Judas' betrayal. Quoting Psalm 41:9, Christ states, "I do not speak concerning all of you. I know whom I have chosen; but that the Scripture may be fulfilled, 'He who eats bread with Me has lifted up his heel against Me'" (John 13:18). This is a cautionary verse that fosters reflection for any disciple who partakes of the memorial Bread.

"Eating Bread" with the Four Thousand and the Five Thousand

By feeding the four thousand and the five thousand, Christ provides a fellowship meal that looks back to feeding the people of Israel in the wilderness, foreshadows the Lord's Supper, and looks forward to "eating bread" in the kingdom. The early ecclesia recognized the connection between the feeding of the five thousand and the Breaking of Bread. A fresco in Rome (i.e., *Fractio Panis*), dated from the early second century A.D., depicts the Breaking of Bread as connected to the five loaves and two fish. The early ecclesia built on the clear connection that John's gospel makes between the feeding of the five thousand and the Lord's Supper; the *Didache* clearly relates the feeding of the five thousand to the Breaking of Bread. These connections make perfect sense because John uses the feeding of the five thousand to introduce a narrative that concludes with Christ declaring, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world" (John 6:51).

Underscoring its importance is the fact that the feeding of the five thousand is the only miracle that is recorded in all four gospels (Matt 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-15). Prior to the miracle, Christ tests the Twelve to see how they would react to the people's need for bread, all the while knowing that he would feed them (John 6:6). Essentially, in his organizing instructions to the Twelve,

Jesus creates a huge family meal, as indicated by the word he uses in Luke 9:14, one that means “a row or party of persons reclining at a meal.”³¹

The emphasis on the arrangement in rows suggests a connection to the showbread. Jesus explicitly arranged the people in rows, and so important was the arrangement of the showbread in rows that it was called *lechem maareketh*, the “bread of rows” (e.g., 1 Chr 9:32; 23:29; 28:16). The fact that the meal begins with five loaves and ends with twelve baskets full of bread (John 6:13) also connects to the showbread. David asked for five loaves as a precursor to receiving the showbread from Ahimelech; the showbread was twelve loaves. The multitude, representing the nation, understood that Christ was both the prophet like Moses and the king of Israel (John 6:14-15), after being fed with holy bread in God’s presence.

Just as with the feeding of the five thousand, the feeding of the four thousand (Matt 15:32-38; Mark 8:1-9) results from Jesus’ intense feelings of compassion for the people (*splagchnizomai*, literally translated as “feeling it in your gut”). The people were in a “wilderness” (Matt 15:33 KJV), and their three-day session with Jesus had exhausted their food supply. So now they faced a long and hungry journey back to their homes. We can infer that the people would have known that they were running out of food but stayed with Jesus anyway. Their spiritual hunger outweighed their physical hunger.

There is no indication that the people petitioned Christ to feed them, even though a multitude had done that earlier after the feeding of the five thousand (John 6:30-58). Therefore, we are invited to view this faithful multitude in the wilderness as a contrast to their ancestors who ate the manna in the wilderness and as a contrast to those in John 6 who followed Christ for natural bread only (John 6:26). The four thousand demonstrated a type of faith made perfect; the miracle began with seven loaves and ended with seven large baskets of food. Their three-day sojourn with Christ filled them with living bread. When we partake of the Bread, our hunger is filled through our Lord’s sacrifice and his resurrection.

³¹ J.H. Thayer, *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: American Book Co., 1889)

Bread of Life, Living Bread

Scripturally, bread means life. Edersheim ³²notes that "Bread was regarded as the mainstay of life..." and bread was such a staple, so necessary for life, that it became a symbol of life. The first occurrence of *lechem* (Hebrew name for "bread") shows God equating bread with life: "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground" (Gen 3:19). God uses the metaphor of bread to tell the first man, Adam, that life will be difficult as a result of his disobedience. Joseph, a powerful type of Christ, was the provider of bread to the known world (Gen 42:53-57). Joseph equates providing bread to saving lives, telling his brothers: "It was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you" Gen 45:5 NIV). God uses manna to teach the people of Israel that life consisted of God's word rather than bread: "So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord" (Deut 8:3). The prophets (Mic 5:2) declared that the Messiah would come from the "House of Bread" (i.e., Bethlehem).

Scripturally, Christ is both the "Bread of Life" and the "Living Bread". In fulfilling the Law and the Prophets, Christ clearly identifies himself as the bread that gives life. Twice he declares, "I am the bread of life" (John 6:35, 48). Yet he also states that he is "living bread" and that partaking of this living bread will enable eternal life: "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever" (John 6:51). One writer notes the distinction between "bread of life" and "living bread": "As the 'living bread' he has life to give; as the 'bread of life' he is given."³³ When we partake of the Bread, we honor both Christ's life and the giving of it. These two aspects of bread are typified by the two kinds of bread in God's literal house. The showbread (*lechem*) in the Holy Place had to be given each week; conversely, the manna in the Most Holy Place was given once and lasted forever.

³² Alfred Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (McLean: Macdonald, n.d.)

³³ John Carter, *The Gospel of John* (Birmingham: CMPA, 1943)

Bread represents an abundant life in Christ. In John 10:10, Jesus states, "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly [*perissos*]." Interestingly, a form of *perissos* is used to describe the "leftover" bread provided by Christ to the five thousand and the four thousand:

- "So they all ate and were filled, and they took up twelve baskets full of the fragments that remained [*perisseuo*]" (Matt 14:20).
- "So they all ate and were filled, and they took up seven large baskets full of the fragments that were left [*perisseuo*]" (Matt 15:37).

The powerful meaning of *perisseuo* is somewhat minimized by the way the passages above have been translated. The word is a superlative, meaning to exceed, both quantitatively and qualitatively. This word is used to describe the efficacy of Christ's saving work: "But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God's grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow [*perisseuo*] to the many!" (Rom 5:15 NIV). Recognizing the transformative power of the gospel in our lives, we are exhorted to respond with overflowing thanksgiving: "You received Christ Jesus the Lord, so continue to live as Christ's people. Sink your roots in him and build on him. Be strengthened by the faith that you were taught, and overflow [*perisseuo*] with thanksgiving" (Col 2:6-7 GWT).

As declared in John 6, bread represents Christ's life-giving body, the Word made Flesh. When we eat of the memorial Bread, we are affirming that Christ's life has saved our lives: "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" (Rom 5:10). Bread represents the life-giving gospel message of the Word made Flesh. Jesus' interaction with the Gentile woman who pleaded with him to save her daughter (Matt 15:21-28; Mark 7:24-30) is contextualized as the provision of bread. Jesus tells the woman, "It is not good to take the children's bread and throw it to the little dogs", in keeping with the principle that the gospel was preached to the Jews first and then the Gentiles (Rom 1:16).

Bread as a Symbol of Trial

From the very beginning, the symbol of bread has been associated with trial. God equates bread to the struggle that is a fundamental part of human existence: "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground" (Gen 3:19). The bread as a symbol of trial would have been very much on Christ's mind as he instituted the Lord's Supper because the "Bread of Affliction" was an integral part of the Passover celebration (Deut 16:13). Both in the first century, and now, the Passover requires the host to state: "This is the bread of affliction that our forefathers ate in the land of Egypt." For God, our "affliction" is always purposeful: "Behold, I have refined you, but not as silver; I have tested you in the furnace of affliction" (Isa 48:10).

In addition to the "bread of affliction", there are other kinds of bread that symbolize our trials. The times where God seems to be far away are typified as the "bread of tears": "My tears have been my bread day and night, while they say unto me all the day, 'Where is thy God?'" (Psa 42:3 Darby). In Psalm 80, the trials that God put before the people of Israel were characterized as the bread of tears: "You have fed them with the bread of tears" (Psa 80:5) and in Isaiah 30:20 the trials are called the "bread of adversity".

It is not a coincidence that the first recorded trial that Christ faced was about bread. Christ's temptation into turn stones to bread wasn't really about hunger; it was about how he would use the occasion of trial to shape his life. Would he live for himself by exercising his miraculous powers for his own ends? Or would he live for God and use the Holy Spirit without measure to glorify God? Christ chose to center his life in God, to spend the currency of his life on the bread that satisfies (Isa 55:2). Christ's response shows that he understood the lesson of the manna, which the people of Israel failed to grasp: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (Matt 4:4). Christ waited for God to provide for him, and consequently "angels came and ministered to Him" (Matt 4:11). The provision of manna was described this way: "Man ate of the bread of the angels" (Psa 78:25 ESV). Christ waited for the manna, and God provided the "bread of angels" for him.

Lessons from the Manna

In his discourse at the synagogue at Capernaum, Christ identified himself as the “real” manna: “I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that one may eat of it and not die” (John 6:48-50). What does the manna tell us about Christ and his teaching?

Manna	Christ
It was provided in response to the people's pleas.	Christ's teaching shows God's responsiveness to His children's pleas: “Or what man is there among you who, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone” (Matt 7:9).
It was provided each day (except the Sabbath).	In Matt 6:11, Christ underscores that bread is provided “today”: “Our appointed bread give us to-day” (YLT).
It was provided day after day (except the Sabbath) for the lifetime of the generation in the Wilderness.	In Luke 11:13, the focus is on God's day-by-day care: “Give us day by day our daily bread.”
It spoiled if kept for another day (except the Sabbath). However, the manna contained in the Golden Pot in the Ark of the Covenant didn't spoil.	Covered by Christ our mercy seat (Rom 3:25) we can escape the corruption of the world (2 Pet 1:4). Christ promises the “hidden manna” to those who overcome (Rev 2:17; Col 3:1).
God states that he rained down the manna.	God's rain provides “bread to the eater” and accomplishes His will (Isa 55:8-11). Comparing himself to the manna, Christ said, “For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me” (John 8:38)
It appeared with the dew.	Comparing himself to the manna, Christ said, “This is the bread which came down from heaven—not as your fathers ate the manna, and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever” (John 6:58). Dew is symbolic of resurrection: “Your people will rise to life! Tell them to leave their graves and celebrate with shouts. You refresh the earth like morning dew; you give life to the

	dead" (Isa 26:19 CEV).
The sun made the manna disappear.	Christ, the Sun of Righteousness (Mal 4:2), told the people that he was the true bread from heaven: "Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him" (John 6:27).
The people of Israel hated the manna, rejecting it as "worthless bread".	Sadly, like their ancestors in the wilderness, many rejected the true manna as "worthless bread": "From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more" (John 6:66).

"Forget about the old, perishable manna provided by Moses", Jesus is saying, "because the real, sustainable manna is right in front of you." When we partake of the Bread, the real Manna is right in front of us.

Offerings of Bread

Under the Mosaic Law, one could offer *minchah qorban*, translated by the King James Version as "meat offering" (Lev 2). This translation reflects the Jacobean vernacular of generically referring to all food as "meat". However, there was no "meat" in the offering; it was an offering of raw or prepared grain; hence, most translations render *minchah qorban* as "grain offering". The word *minchah* is used to describe a gift; it is also used to describe an offering, as evidenced in "Sacrifice and offering [*minchah*] You did not desire" (Psa 40:6). The other word (*qorban*) means something "brought near" (i.e., as to an altar). By Christ's day, the idea of a gift given to God had been twisted into a loophole used to avoid obligations (e.g., Matt 15:15; Mark 7:11).

The grain offering as "a gift brought near" reminds us of the gifts given to us by the actions of Christ, in his role as our High Priest, regarding "gifts and sacrifices" (Heb 5:1, 8:3-4; 9:9). This High Priestly gift is *doron*, the same word used by Paul in Ephesians, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift [*doron*] of God" (Eph 2:8). Paul clearly has in mind the High Priestly gift

because he goes on to state that Christ has brought us near to God: "But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ" (Eph 2:13). When we participate in the Bread, we are reminded of the gift that brings us close to God.

The grain offering was remarkably flexible in terms of what could be offered. The offering could be the first fruits of grain or fine flour or unleavened cakes or unleavened wafers. The offering could be raw, baked, fried. Salt had to be part of the offering; conversely, honey and leaven could not be part of the offering. Frankincense and oil were also part of the offering. Part of the offering was burned on the altar, and the priests could eat anything that remained. The part dedicated to God was the "memorial" portion (Lev 2:9), which was a sweet smell to God. The type of peace/fellowship offering determined whether the offering could be flour or fried or baked (Num 15:1-16).

The grain offering was everywhere in the Mosaic Law. The grain offering was to follow the burnt offering. It was the sin offering for a poor person (Lev 5:11-13). It was the offering of a woman accused of adultery (Num 5:15). It was part of the induction of a priest (Lev 6:20). It was part of the daily offering (Num 28:8), the Sabbath offering (Num 28:9), the monthly offering (Num 28:12-13), the offerings related to Passover (Num 28:21), the Feast of Weeks (Num 28:28), the Feast of Trumpets (Num 29:3), the Day of Atonement (Num 29:9), and the Feast of Tabernacles (Num 29:14). The grain offering was closely associated with the burnt offering and the peace offering (e.g., Josh 22:23).

The fact that the grain offerings were varied, that they were ubiquitous in the Mosaic Law, and that they constituted both a memorial and food for priests all connect us to the Breaking of Bread. The body, represented by the Bread, is varied and composed of individuals. As we take the Bread, we reflect that the grain offering was a sweet-smelling memorial, found everywhere in the Law. So too are we in Christ: "Now thanks be to God who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and through us diffuses the fragrance of His knowledge in every place" (2 Cor 2:14). The grain offering was the food of priests, and Peter reminds us that God has chosen us to be "a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 2:4). In the Breaking of Bread, we come together to remember that

we have been called to holiness and to look forward to a time when we will be “priests to our God” (Rev 5:10).

Leaven

Any discussion of bread has to include the symbol of leaven. We have seen the large role that unleavened bread played in the Mosaic Law. In keeping the Passover, the first Lord's Supper undoubtedly used unleavened bread. In the New Testament, leaven is almost always a negative symbol (except for Matt 13:33 and Luke 13:21). Paul uses the symbol of leaven to reprove the Corinthian ecclesia for its arrogance, especially in its celebration of the Lord's Supper:

Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. (1 Cor 5:6-8)

Similarly, Paul employs the symbol of leaven to chastise the Galatians for their insistence on keeping the Mosaic Law: “You ran well. Who hindered you from obeying the truth? This persuasion does not come from Him who calls you. A little leaven leavens the whole lump” (Gal 5:7-9).

Paul's statements show why spiritual leaven is so antithetical to celebrating the Lord's Supper in a manner that glorifies God. If the foundation of the Lord's Supper is thanksgiving, then pride removes the possibility of true thankfulness. Pride takes the focus away from Christ and puts it on us. Once this misguided focus is established, all sorts of malign practices (“malice and wickedness”) begin to occur. Crucially, pride makes self-examination almost impossible because it makes us engage in an ongoing dialogue of self-deception. Paul uses the word “persuasion” (Gal 5:8, *peismone*) to describe this process of persuading ourselves to obey our own needs rather than God's will.

One example (Matt 16:5-12; Mark 8:13-21) provides a stark demonstration of how hard it is for us to truly recognize the impact of leaven in our spiritual lives. The disciples had forgotten to take sufficient bread. Jesus takes this opportunity to teach them about

spiritual leaven: “Take heed and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and the Sadducees” (Matt 16:6, Mark’s account adds *Herodians* to the watch list). “Take heed” (*horao*) means “to see clearly”. “Beware” (*prosexo*) means to “attend to yourself” and it seems Christ had in mind a passage from the Septuagint: “Only take heed to yourself [*prosexo* in Septuagint], and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life” (Deut 4:9).

The disciples completely miss Jesus’ point about the leaven. They think that Jesus is reproving them for their poor preparation. Jesus responds by telling them:

- They had little faith
- They had hard hearts
- They had eyes that didn’t see
- They had ears that didn’t hear
- They didn’t remember

Such is the impact of leaven. Pride was a key element of the doctrine of leaven that Christ was warning against. Pride eliminates the need for God, as evidenced in one of Christ’s parables: “The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector’” (Luke 18:11). The Pharisee’s dialogue isn’t with God; it is internal (“prayed thus with himself”).

Each Breaking of Bread provides an opportunity to reflect on how pride is impacting us. God knows if pride is causing our faith to be weak, our hearts to be hard, our vision to be clouded, and our hearing to be impaired. Leaven is so self-deceptive because it stops us from remembering what God has done for us and prevents us from being truly thankful. Each Breaking of Bread is an opportunity to purge our leaven, to examine ourselves, to see ourselves clearly.

CHAPTER NINE

The Bread of the Presence

“And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’”

(Luke 22:19)

Christ states that partaking of the bread is an act of “remembrance”. Luke’s use of the seldom-occurring word *anamnesis* drives the reader to Leviticus 24:7, where the Septuagint uses the same word to describe the showbread. It is logical to assume that the disciples’ thoughts would have immediately jumped to the bread placed new before God every Sabbath: “It shall be a bread of remembrance, an offering by fire to Jehovah. Every sabbath day he shall arrange it before Jehovah continually, on the part of the children of Israel: an everlasting covenant” (Lev 24: 7-8, Darby).

This bread, translated “showbread” in the King James Version (Ex. 25:30), is *lechem paniym* (which literally means “Bread of the Faces”). The reason that the Hebrew word is plural rather than singular is that it demonstrates the ideas of emotion and thought as reflected in the changing expressions of one’s face. The word is therefore suggestive of one’s “presence” or one’s collective personality or the wholeness of one’s being.

As a result, most translations render *lechem paniym* as “bread of the presence”; for example, “Put the bread of the Presence on this table to be before me at all times” (Exod 25:30 NIV). This bread was widely understood to have a fundamental connection to the Messiah: “Ancient

symbolism, both Jewish and Christian, regarded 'the bread of the Presence' as an emblem of the Messiah."³⁴ Because it was a table set with bread and wine (Num 4:7), it is also a clear symbol of the Messiah's table set for his Supper.

The Bread

The bread placed on the Mosaic table was made from fine flour and baked into twelve loaves. The number twelve indicates the spiritual community represented by the twelve tribes of Israel. The arrangement of the twelve loaves was so important that another name for the showbread was *lechem maareketh*, which is translated as "bread of rows" (e.g., 1 Chr 9:32; 23:29; 28:16). The loaves are called *challah* (e.g., Lev 24:5), which means "pierced", and its root word (*chalal*) is used to describe Jesus: "But He was wounded [*chalal*] for our transgressions" (Isa 53:5). New bread was exchanged for old every Sabbath. The new bread was "hot" (1 Sam 21:6) when it was placed before God. The old bread was to be eaten by the priests in a "holy place" (Lev 24:9), which in Jesus' day was the temple court of the priests. Scripture does not specify if the bread was leavened or unleavened.

Memory and the Sense of Smell

The focus on the showbread as a remembrance is reinforced through the explicit connection to smell: "And you shall put pure frankincense on each row, that it may be on the bread for a memorial" (Lev 24:7). The sweet-smelling frankincense emphasizes the bread as a remembrance. It is a well-established fact of neuroscience that our brains have been designed to connect smell with memory, especially memories that have a strong emotional connection. There would have been another smell that the priests would have associated with the showbread—fresh bread. Since the bread was hot (1 Sam 21:6) when it was initially placed in God's presence at the start of the week, the smells of frankincense and fresh bread would have mingled together to

³⁴ Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple, Its Ministry and Services* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994)

create a strong memory.

Frankincense is a Biblical symbol of prayer (e.g., Rev 5:8). Prayers are understood as an act of memorialization. For example, the angel told Cornelius, "Your prayers and your alms have come up for a memorial before God" (Acts 10:4). Prayers figure prominently in the Bread and Wine, with a prayer for both emblems of the Lord's Table. The Lord's Table is an opportunity for prayer (both voiced communal prayer and silent individual prayer) to be a memorial before God, just as Cornelius' prayers were. Just as God has designed our brains to connect smells with powerful and significant emotional memories, He designed the process of the Lord's Supper to connect us to Him and to His Son by remembering.

The Table Setting

The Mosaic table set with Bread and Wine deepens our understanding of Christ's table set with Bread and Wine. When the priests entered the Holy Place, they would see a rectangular acacia wood table overlaid with gold. The table was set with golden tableware: dishes on which the bread was placed, pitchers of wine for the drink offerings, spoons to sprinkle the frankincense, and bowls to hold the frankincense. The Bread and Wine together speak of Melchizedek (Gen 14:18-20) and of Christ (as the great High Priest after Melchizedek's order), who saves "to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them" (Heb 7:25).

The Mosaic table was covered in gold. The Bible uses the symbol of a metallurgical process (i.e., refining gold) to represent faith that has been tried through adversity (e.g., Job 23:10; Zech 13:9; Mal 3:1-3; Rev 3:18). The commands of the Lord's Supper use a word describing the refining process of metals (*dokimazo*) to describe our actions at the Breaking of Bread. Thayer states that *dokimazo* means "to test, examine, prove, scrutinize (to see whether a thing is genuine or not), as metals."³⁵ In 1 Corinthians 11:28, we read: "But let a man examine himself [*dokimazo*], and so let him eat of the bread" and in 2 Corinthians 13:4 we read: "Examine yourselves as to whether you are

³⁵ J.H. Thayer, *A Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: American Book Co., 1889)

in the faith. Test [*dokimazo*] yourselves.” At the table, we are commanded to examine our own faith and to prayerfully assess the progress of our own ongoing refinement, a refining process that continues until we see our Lord’s face: “...you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested [*dokimazo*] by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet 1:6-7).

The Meaning of “Table”

The use of the word “table” for the shewbread (*shulchan*) is its first occurrence in the Bible. Although the table’s symbolism can be used to describe the assurance of God’s care (e.g., “You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies” Psa 23:5), the table is primarily a symbol of fellowship and community. David’s treatment of Mephibosheth is one example: “Do not fear, for I will surely show you kindness for Jonathan your father’s sake, and will restore to you all the land of Saul your grandfather; and you shall eat bread at my table continually” (2 Sam 9:7).

The priests served at the table, and their role was to glorify God and deepen the relationship between God and the people of His covenant. Sadly, in passages such as Malachi 1, the priests served themselves rather than God and thus acted like the Lord’s Table meant nothing: “You offer polluted bread on my altar. You say, ‘How have we polluted you?’ In that you say, ‘Yahweh’s table is contemptible’” (Mal 1:7 WEB). Instead of God’s name being magnified, it was profaned: “But you profane it, in that you say, ‘The table of the Lord is defiled; and its fruit, its food, is contemptible’” (Mal 1:12). The defining characteristic of an unacceptable table is to use the table to serve oneself rather than God.

Conversely, Christ’s ministry emphasizes a table that glorifies God through fellowship and community. The gospel of Luke provides multiple examples of this emphasis. The meal at Levi’s house shows that Christ’s table is for repentant sinners:

And their scribes and the Pharisees complained against His disciples, saying, “Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?” Jesus answered and said to them, “Those who are well have no need

of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance.” (Luke 5:30-32)

The meal at Simon's house (Luke 7) demonstrates that Christ's table is composed of two kinds of sinners: one kind that is focused on the forgiveness of their sins in Christ, and one kind that is so focused on the sins of others that they don't see their own need for forgiveness. The meal at Zaccheus' house in Luke 19 has a similar message; there are two kinds of sinners, those who know they are lost without Christ and those who don't.

The Face and the Presence

The Hebrew word for “face” is ubiquitous in the Old Testament, occurring over two thousand times. The word is frequently translated in the King James Version by the word “before”. Therefore, the many references in the Mosaic Law to worship, sacrifices, feasts, etc. as being “before the LORD” indicate that these things are being done in His presence, before His face. The Bread of the Presence is no exception: “Every Sabbath he shall set it in order before the Lord continually, being taken from the children of Israel by an everlasting covenant” (Lev 24:8). “Before God” is indicative of a relationship with God. For example, in Genesis 17, Abraham's close relationship with God is described as walking “before” Him (17:1), and Abraham's plaintive plea for Ishmael to have a relationship with God is “Oh, that Ishmael might live before You!” (Gen 17:18).

Humankind's natural relationship with God is exemplified by Adam and Eve's decision to hide from God's face: “And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence [*paniym*] of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, ‘Where are you?’

So he said, ‘I heard Your voice in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; and I hid myself’” (Gen 3:8). Fear, resulting from their awareness of their sin, made Adam and Eve flee from God's face. The rejection of God's redemptive purpose in Christ is also described as hiding the face, “And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him” (Isa 53:3). Our unrepentant sin makes God hide His face: “But your iniquities

have separated you from your God; and your sins have hidden His face from you" (Isa 59:2).

Despite the fact that the natural relationship between God and humankind precludes a literal "face-to-face" relationship, God demands that we seek His face. David writes: "When You said, 'Seek My face,' My heart said to You, 'Your face, Lord, I will seek'" (Psa 27:8). Seeking God's face is to be our constant desire: "Seek the Lord and His strength; seek His face evermore!" (Psa 105:4). Moses shows us how to seek a "face-to-face" relationship with God. Although Moses began by hiding his face in fear (Exod 3:6), he progressed to metaphorically seeing God face to face, the highest expression of a close relationship:

- "So the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (Exod 33:11).
- "But since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face" (Deut 33:11).

Literally, Moses could not see God's face. In Exodus 33, God promises to send His presence back with Moses to the people of Israel. When he asks God to show him God's glory, God responds by putting Moses in the cleft of a rock and covering him while the Divine character passes by him. God tells Moses, "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live... My face shall not be seen." (Exod 33:20-23). When Moses goes back to the people after this interaction with God, God's promised "presence" (i.e., "face") is reflected in Moses' face, which literally shone, requiring him to cover his face with a veil (Exod 34:29-35).

In 2 Corinthians, Paul uses this event to demonstrate how Christ fulfills the type foreshadowed by Moses by showing the superiority of our relationship with God through Christ. Paul writes, "But we all, with unveiled face [*prosopon*], beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor 3:18). Because Christ stands before God's face for us, through spiritual transformation we can figuratively see His face: "For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence [*prosopon*, literally "face"] of God for us" (Heb

9:24).

As with *paniym* in the Old Testament, *prosopon* in the New Testament means both “face” and “presence”. Through Christ, we stand in the presence of God, in him we see God’s glory in Christ’s face: “For it is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor 4:6). We can better understand God through Christ because we have seen the Divine character demonstrated in the record of Christ’s life; Christ is “the express image [character] of His person” (Heb 1:3). When we partake of the Bread and Wine, we celebrate the closeness of our relationship with God through the access to the Divine presence that Christ affords us.

Access to God’s Presence through Christ

There are several passages that discuss the access that we have to God through Christ. *Prosagoge*, the Greek word for “access”, literally translates to “leading or bringing into the presence of”, and Barclay³⁶ notes that this word is used frequently to describe being led into the presence of a king or ruler. *Prosagoge* appears only three times, always in reference to our status in Christ:

- “For through Him we both have access [*prosagoge*] by one Spirit to the Father” (Eph 2:18).
- “...we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access [*prosagoge*] by faith into this grace in which we stand” (Rom 5:1-2).
- “...in Christ Jesus our Lord, in whom we have boldness and access [*prosagoge*] with confidence through faith in Him” (Eph 3:11-12).

Prosagoge is also used in the Septuagint to describe the animals being led for a sacrificial offering. A related word [*prosago*] is used more frequently in the Septuagint to describe the sacrifices being led; Peter seems to have this image in mind when describing Christ’s work: “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He

³⁶ William Barclay, *New Testament Words* (Westminster: John Knox, 2000)

might bring [*prosago*] us to God" (1 Pet 3:18).

Because the priests entered into God's presence every Sabbath to exchange the twelve loaves of the Bread of the Presence and then to eat the bread, the first century ecclesia appears to have connected the Sabbath practice of the Bread of the Presence with the Sabbath practice of the Breaking of Bread. Edersheim states that "the apostolic practice of partaking the Lord's Supper every Lord's-day may have been in imitation of the priests eating the showbread every Sabbath."³⁷ Partaking of the Bread and Wine on the Sabbath looks forward to partaking at the Lord's table in the kingdom, when the promise of the Sabbath will be fulfilled (Heb 4:1-10). When we participate in the Breaking of Bread we affirm that we are looking forward to a time when, through God's grace, we will see God's face (e.g., "They shall see His face" Rev 22:4). Like Paul, we long for that day: "Now all we can see of God is like a cloudy picture in a mirror. Later we will see him face to face. We don't know everything, but then we will, just as God completely understands us" (1 Cor 13:12 CEV).

Remembering the Face

We end our discussion of the Bread of the Face where we began it—with the connection of the showbread to remembrance. Remembering faces is a specific cognitive task in humans that is related to (yet different from) other kinds of memory. For example, there is a medical condition called "Face Blindness" where people can't remember faces but their memory for other items is not impaired in any way. We know that children learn to remember faces. Like so many cognitive functions, there appear to be critical developmental stages for honing facial memory. We know that remembering faces is impacted by experience. We also know that neutral expressions make faces harder to remember, while emotion makes it easier to remember faces. We spend our lives as children of God learning to recognize and remember the faces of our Father and His Son. Our experiences with others make us able to see and remember our brothers and sisters. Like Moses in Exodus 34, our comprehension of the character

³⁷ Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple, Its Ministry and Services* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994)

reflected in God's face (mercy, grace, longsuffering, goodness, and truth) binds us to Him and to His Son.

CHAPTER TEN

The Peace Offering

"But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace."

(Eph 2:13-14)

The Lord's Supper is a meal that celebrates the restored relationship between God and humankind. It is a joyful celebration of salvation through the everlasting covenant. The peace (or fellowship) offering was a foreshadowing of the Lord's Supper; the offering culminated in a joyous meal in which God, priests, and the people participated. The meal was the most important part of this offering; Edersheim states, "In peace-offerings, the sacrificial meal was the point of main importance."³⁸

The Hebrew and Greek words used for the peace/fellowship offering demonstrate its connection to the Lord's Supper. The Hebrew word for this offering is *shelem*; which literally means "sacrifices of peace". It is important for us to understand that "peace" in this context means much more than "absence of conflict", hence the use of the plural form. Peace means "wholeness", "well-being", "harmony", "friendship", "right relationships", and "prosperity". The Greek word used to describe the peace/fellowship offering in the Septuagint is equally rich in meanings. The Septuagint translates the offering described in Leviticus 3 and 7 as "the offering of salvation" by using the Greek word *soterios* for the Hebrew word *shelem*. This Greek word and its cognates are translated

³⁸ Alfred Edersheim, *The Temple, Its Ministry and Services* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994)

in a variety of ways, most frequently as “heal” or “save”. Barclay states that this word and its cognates have “a rich heritage... it described the saving, preserving, providential power of God in the crises of history and the crises of individual life..³⁹ In Isaiah 53, the author uses tautology to equate “peace” and being “healed”: “The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed” (Isa 53:5). Both the Greek and Hebrew words have as their overall meaning of “peace” as the concept of “making whole”.

From these meanings, we can see why this offering has been translated in a variety of ways. Below, we see some of the many ways that the offering named in Leviticus 7:11 has been translated:

- “This is the law of the peace-offering sacrifice which he is to present to the Lord.” (NET)
- “Here are some more rules for friendship offerings anyone may bring to the Lord.” (NlrV)
- “These are the regulations for the fellowship offering anyone may present to the Lord.” (NIV)
- “This is the ritual of the sacrifice of the offering of well-being that one may offer to the Lord.” (NRSV)

The peace/fellowship offering was “a joyous recognition of all that God had done for His people and a gladness of fellowship shared by priest and people alike with the Creator. It was not to make peace but to celebrate peace already made.”⁴⁰

A Sacrifice: the Foundation of the Peace/Fellowship Meal

The first time that the peace/fellowship offering occurs, it uses language that foreshadows the Lord's Supper: “An altar of earth you shall make for me and sacrifice on it... your peace offerings, your sheep and your oxen. In every place where I cause my name to be remembered I will come to you and bless you” (Exod 20:24 ESV). From God's perspective, the foundation of the sacrifice was

³⁹ William Barclay, *New Testament Words* (Westminster: John Knox, 2000)

⁴⁰ F.E. Mitchell, *Offerings, Feasts, and Sanctuary* (Birmingham: CMPA, 1990/Electronic edition 2016)

remembrance and blessing, two foundational concepts for the Lord's Supper as well. The second occurrence of the peace/fellowship offering is equally evocative; in Exodus 24, Moses makes the blood of the peace offering the blood of the covenant: "And Moses took the blood, sprinkled it on the people, and said, 'This is the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you according to all these words'" (Exod 24:8).

The person making the offering brought the animal to the priest and put his hand on the animal's head while it was being killed. The priest received a portion, God received a portion, and the offerer received a portion. Although the types of the Lord's Supper are readily apparent (e.g., identifying with the sacrifice), there is an important difference between the sacrifice of the peace/fellowship offering and the sacrifice commemorated by the Lord's Supper. Christ is a peace/fellowship offering provided for those partaking in the Lord's Supper. As with Abraham and Isaac on Mount Moriah, God has provided the lamb. The anti-type (i.e., the Lord's Supper) is superior to the type (i.e., the peace/fellowship offering): "The essential idea is that of fellowship with God through the partaking of a meal in His presence—a meal provided by Him."⁴¹ When we partake of the Bread and Wine, we affirm that it is Christ's sacrifice that has made us whole: "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast... But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For He Himself is our peace" (Eph 2:8-14).

Breaking down barriers was implicit in the range of acceptable sacrifices that comprised the peace/fellowship offering. It was the only sacrifice that was shared between the priests, the one making the offering, and God (metaphorically through the burning of the fat). This offering was also the only one in which either a male or female animal was acceptable. Either an Israelite or a "stranger" (Lev 22:18) could make this offering. Although God required perfect animals for the thanksgiving and vow kinds of the offering, He also accepted animals with imperfections for the freewill offering (Lev 22:23). Paul describes Christ's sacrifice as barrier-breaking and peace-making: "For Christ is our living peace. He has made a unity of the conflicting elements of

⁴¹ H.A. Whittaker, *Studies in the Gospels* (Cannock: Biblia, n.d)

Jew and Gentile by breaking down the barrier which lay between us" (Eph 2:14 Phillips). Through our baptism in Christ, the potential barriers of ethnicity, gender, and socio-economic status are removed because we "are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28).

The Reasons for the Individual Peace/Fellowship Offering

There were three reasons for making the peace/fellowship offering. The offering was made as an expression of thanksgiving or as an expression of free will or as part of a vow. We have seen that "thanksgiving" is so closely associated with the Lord's Supper that the term is a synonym for the celebration. The vow was often related to the answer to prayer (e.g., Hannah in 1 Sam 1:21-28), especially prayer concerning deliverance from illness or danger (e.g., Jonah 2:7-9). Because this was not a compulsory offering, it represented a choice to glorify God through sacrifice.

Psalms 116 portrays the sacrifice of Christ as a peace/fellowship offering, and its words give voice to Christ's motivation in offering himself. Christ is motivated by love for God because the Father heard his prayers (v. 1-2). Christ prayed to be delivered from death, trouble, and sorrow, and God delivered him (v. 3-8). Christ's thanks to God motivated him to take up the cup, to align his will with God's will: "Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done" (Luke 22:42). Christ was motivated to fulfill his vow to God (v. 14, 18), a vow to do God's will: "Behold, I have come to do Your will, O God" (Heb 10:9). Christ viewed his sacrifice as a peace offering: "I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving" (v. 17). Our motivations for partaking of the Bread and Wine parallel the three motivations for the peace/fellowship offering. We eat the Bread and drink the Wine because we are thankful, because we seek to submit our will to God's will, and because we have vowed, as part of God's covenant people, that "All that the Lord has spoken we will do" (Exod 19:8).

The reason for the peace/fellowship offering determined when the food from the sacrifice had to be consumed. If thanksgiving was the reason for the offering, then the meat had to be eaten that same day (Lev 7:15). If the reason for the offering was related to either a vow or a free

will offering, then the meat could be eaten up until the end of the second day, with the understanding that any leftovers must be burned on the third day (Lev 7:16-18). What is the message for us regarding the differentiation of leftovers based on the motivation of the offerer? I think that the implicit message is that to be truly thankful, we have to be focused on the “now” by being truly present in the moment. Conversely, both reflecting on vows and aligning our will with God’s will are journeys of growth that take time to accomplish.

The Reasons for the Compulsory Peace/Fellowship Offering

Although an individual could choose to offer a peace/fellowship offering at any time, there were some cases that mandated this offering. For individuals, this offering was required when a Nazarite had completed his vows (Num 6:14) and it also appears to be the “ram of consecration” for the priests (Lev 8:22). For the nation of Israel, a peace/fellowship offering was required as part of the Feast of Pentecost (Lev 23:19) and commanded when the people of Israel entered the Promised Land (Deut 27:7). Kings also required the people of Israel to participate in peace offerings at important times. When King David brought the ark to Jerusalem, he made a peace offering for the people (2 Sam 6:17-18). David also made a peace offering on behalf of the people so that the plague would be stopped (2 Sam 24:25). Peace offerings for the people were used several times by Solomon (1 Kgs 3:15; 8:63) and he eventually institutionalized the practice as a triannual event (1 Kgs 9:25). Hezekiah augmented the renewal of the Passover with peace/fellowship offerings (2 Chr 30:22).

What can we learn from these observances of the peace/fellowship offering? As we participate in the Bread and Wine, we recognize that we, like the Nazarite and the priest, have made a vow to God by becoming part of the everlasting covenant. The fact that the offering was part of Pentecost has special resonance for us: “According to his sovereign plan, he brought us into being through his word of truth, so that we would be a kind of first fruits of all he created” (Jas 1:18 Mounce). The times when the entire nation of Israel came together to participate in the peace/fellowship offering remind us that when we come together in our individual ecclesia to partake of the Bread and Wine, we are also part of the larger body of spiritual Israel, all of whom

are celebrating our peace with God through Christ.

The God of Peace and Shared Joy

The peace/fellowship offering foreshadowed the Lord's Supper in its joyousness. We are reminded that "joy" (*chara*) is the root of "thanksgiving" (*eucharesteo*). Edersheim writes: "The most joyous of all sacrifices was the peace-offering."⁴² Thanksgiving was expressed for being made whole by healing or deliverance from risk.

At the Lord's Supper, the joy of our healing and deliverance through Christ is shared, and this sharing empowers the fellowship at the Lord's Table: "That which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write to you that your joy may be full" (1 John 1:3-4).

This offering was also a unique foreshadowing of the Lord's Supper in that it was to be shared. The person offering the sacrifice could eat of the sacrifice, and the priest could eat together with the family offering the sacrifice. When we celebrate the Lord's Supper, we are together with our High Priest, who is "King of Peace" (Heb 7:2). We fellowship with Christ and each other by gathering together as the one body: "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ" (1 Cor 12:12 ESV). The cup and the bread are the symbols of our shared connection to each other and to Christ: "The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a sharing in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a sharing in the body of Christ?" (1 Cor 10:16 NRSV). The bread and wine are a celebration of things shared, just as the peace/fellowship offering was a celebration of things shared.

As we examine ourselves at the Lord's Table, we have to ask if we are truly focused on what we have in common. Partaking of the Bread and Wine is an expression of shared joy; however, we can have a tendency to focus on what separates us. The ecclesia at Corinth was focused on the many things that separated, not the one thing that

⁴² Alfred Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (McLean: Macdonald, n.d.)

unified: "I urge you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to agree together, to end your divisions, and to be united by the same mind and purpose" (1 Cor 1:10 NET). The word translated "united" here is *katartizō* ("perfectly joined together" in the KJV), the same word used to describe us as "complete" by the God of Peace through the blood of the everlasting covenant: "Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever" (Heb 13:20-21). *Katartizo* literally means "to mend or repair" (e.g., the word used to describe the disciples mending their fishing nets in Matt 4:21). In participating in the Bread and Wine, those symbols of the everlasting covenant, we joyfully celebrate the reality that our relationship with the Father has been repaired. The God of peace, through the blood of the Prince of peace (Isa 9:6), has joined us together as one body.

We know that the offerers' treatment of others was a reason why God did not accept peace/fellowship offerings. In Amos 5:22, God rejects fat peace/fellowship offerings because the poor were being treated differently than the well-off (verses 11-12). The Corinthians made the same mistake: "Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing?" (1 Cor 11:20-22). As we examine ourselves at the Lord's Table, we reflect on whether we, like those in the time of Amos and at Corinth, are maintaining the required format of worship while undermining its purpose.

The Lord's Supper and the Peace/Fellowship Offering

It is widely understood that the peace/fellowship offering is a clear foreshadowing of the Lord's Supper. The peace/fellowship offering was a joyful communal meal centered on the celebration of the individual and communal well-being brought about by right relationships. The early ecclesia's practice of the Lord's Supper embodied this ideal: "And every day, they continued to gather together in the temple, breaking

bread from house to house, sharing their food with joy and simplicity of heart, praising God, and finding favor with all the people" (Acts 2:46-47, Mounce).

We are reminded that Christ has made a powerful promise that echoes the shared meal of the peace/fellowship offering: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me" (Rev 3:20). Let us share the meal with joy in recognition that our relationship with God, Christ, and each other has been made whole.

SECTION THREE

Relationships

CHAPTER ELEVEN	The Cup and the Covenant
CHAPTER TWELVE	The Lord's Table
CHAPTER THIRTEEN	The Marriage Supper of the Lamb
CHAPTER FOURTEEN	Who Is the Greatest?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Cup and the Covenant

“Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.’”

(Luke 22:20)

In his use of metaphor, Christ equates the cup with a covenant (Luke 22:20; 1 Cor 11:25). Covenant is a ubiquitous Biblical concept, most frequently used to describe the right relationship between God and humankind. The two words rendered “covenant” help us to understand the elemental characteristics of this relationship. *Berith* is used in the Old Testament (occurring almost 300 times). This word has the denotation of “cutting”, a reference to the sacrifice that accompanied the start of the relationship. Connotatively, *berith* carries the idea of a relationship whose purpose is shalom (“peace”).

In the New Testament, *diatheke* is used (occurring 33 times, most frequently in Hebrews). The Septuagint translation provides an important insight into the meaning of Biblical covenants between God and humankind. The Septuagint translates *berith* as *diatheke*. The Septuagint’s translators could have used *suntheke*, which was the normal Greek word for covenant. However, *suntheke* is descriptive of a relationship between equals; therefore, it was not an appropriate word to use to describe the arrangement of our relationship with God. As we consider the cup as a covenant, we recognize that the metaphor represents the arrangement of an unequal relationship between two parties, confirmed by sacrifice, whose goal is peace. The cup symbolizes the love that God and Christ have for us: “The new

covenant was an arrangement of good things, of joy and gladness.”⁴³

The Cup Represents a New Covenant

Jesus tells the Twelve gathered around him that they are partaking of a “new” covenant represented by the cup. Jesus calls the covenant “new” (*kainos*, rather than *neos*). Since Christ calls the cup the “new” covenant, he is distinguishing it from an existing covenant. Because Jesus uses the word *kainos* rather than *neos* to describe the covenant, he is emphasizing something far beyond chronological order. Vine notes the difference between the two words: “*Kainos* denotes ‘new,’ of that which is unaccustomed or unused, not ‘new’ in time, recent, but ‘new’ as to form or quality, of different nature from what is contrasted as old.”⁴⁴

Although observers used the word *kainos* to describe Jesus’ teaching (Mark 1:27), it isn’t a word that Jesus himself used very often. *Kainos* does appear in a parable about the disastrous consequences of attempting to patch old clothes with new clothes and putting new wine in old wineskins (Luke 5:36-39). The takeaway from the parable is that there needs to be a separation between old and new. Significantly, Jesus does use *kainos* immediately after instituting the Lord’s Supper: “A new [*kainos*] commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35). Christ is demanding a new behavior in keeping with the new covenant.

The Twelve who gathered around Jesus understood that he was contextualizing the new covenant as distinct from the Mosaic covenant (Exod 24:6-8). The new covenant represented by the cup is both different and better than the one represented by Moses. It is the new covenant prophesied in Jeremiah 31:

“Behold, the days are coming,” says the Lord, “when I will make a new [*kainos* in the Septuagint] covenant with the house of Israel and with

⁴³ John Carter, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Birmingham: CMPA, 1939/Electronic edition 2015)

⁴⁴ W.E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Iowa Falls: World Bible, 1981)

the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people. No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more." (Jer 31:31-34)

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews quotes this passage from Jeremiah 31 twice (Heb 8:6–13, 10:16) and spends a large portion of the letter explaining why the covenant ushered in by Christ is different and better.

Christ is One Reason Why the New Covenant is Different and Better

The covenant outlines the relationship between God and humankind. Christ is the *mesites* (which literally translates to "middle-goer") of the new covenant. Half of all references to Christ as mediator are in Hebrews:

- "But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, inasmuch as He is also Mediator of a better covenant, which was established on better promises" (Heb 8:6).
- "...how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance" (Heb 9:14-15).
- "...to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel" (Heb 12:24).

Taking the above verses together, we see how different and better the

new covenant is as a result of Christ's "more excellent ministry".

First, the promises are better because Christ is the embodiment and confirmation of the promises made to Abraham and David:

- "Jesus Christ has become a servant to the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made to the fathers" (Rom 15:8).
- "For all the promises of God in Him are Yes, and in Him Amen, to the glory of God through us" (2 Cor 1:20).

Christ's more excellent ministry connects us to God as His heirs and children (Gal 3:29; Gal 4:28; Eph 2:12; Eph 3:6). Paul points out that the children of promise are the faithful; the Mosaic covenant did not require a family relationship, but the new covenant did: "Those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God; but the children of the promise are counted as the seed" (Rom 9:8). When we take of the cup, we are mindful that we are part of the family of the faithful, as "heirs according to the promise":

For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. (Gal 3:26-29)

In this family, we receive the promise of equality before God through Christ. The new covenant promised a relationship with God that is breathtaking in its equity: "for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them." The cup of the new covenant should remind us that we have equal status before God, as His children: "...whatever is promised to Abraham and Christ is also promised to their federal constituents—to the sons of Abraham, and brethren of Christ, by adoption into the family of God."⁴⁵

Second, as Hebrews 9:14-15 and 12:24 demonstrate, Christ's work has ensured that forgiveness, peace, and redemption are the foundation for our relationship with God, fulfilling the promise of

⁴⁵ John Thomas, *Elpis Israel* (Birmingham: CMPA, 1849/ Electronic edition: 2013)

Jeremiah 31:34: “For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” One commentator⁴⁶ remarked, “The shed blood of Jesus is the means of forgiveness and peace. To these Abel’s offering bore witness, but neither the blood of the animals nor his own availed to secure them.” Our recognition that we have been redeemed, not by our works but by Christ’s sacrifice, motivates us to “serve the living God” and to be obedient in ways that those “sprinkled” by the blood of the old covenant were not (Exod 24:7-8).

Third, the new covenant is better because of Christ’s ongoing work as priest and mediator. In Hebrews 7, the writer demonstrates the superiority of the new covenant priesthood (i.e., after the order of Melchizedek) to the Mosaic priesthood. Christ is the “surety” of the new covenant because he is always there for us: “Jesus has become a surety of a better covenant... He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them” (Heb 7:22-25). Jesus’ ongoing work also enables us to know God in a way that was impossible for the Mosaic covenant. In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul graphically describes how our knowledge of God is much more intimate than was possible under the old covenant: “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor 3:18).

“All Will Know Me”: Christ as Covenant

Christ is the priest of the new covenant; he is the mediator of the new covenant; he is the surety of the new covenant. Two prophetic passages—both of which specifically applied to Christ in the New Testament—go even further. In these passages, Jesus is called a “covenant”:

- “I, the Lord, have called You in righteousness,
And will hold Your hand;
I will keep You and give You as a covenant to the people,

⁴⁶ John Carter, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Birmingham: CMPA, 1939/Electronic edition 2015)

As a light to the Gentiles" (Isa 42:6).

- "Thus says the Lord:
'In an acceptable time I have heard You,
And in the day of salvation I have helped You;
I will preserve You and give You
As a covenant to the people'" (Isa 49:8).

The new covenant promised that we would "know" God. We know God because His character was manifested so completely by Christ:

- "God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb 1:1-4).
- "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him" (Col 1:15-16).

The new covenant is about creation in and through Christ; Paul states that God "created all things through Jesus Christ" (Eph 3:9). Christ is the template for our new creation; we model ourselves after him when we "put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him" (Col 3:10). To partake of the cup of the new covenant is to realize that we are created—and renewed—through Christ: "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Eph 2:10).

Creation is the ultimate act of "newness". To participate in the new covenant is to be created, to be "new", through Christ. Paul tells the Corinthians, "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new" (2 Cor 5:17). Indeed, Paul emphasizes the fundamental importance of our new creation in Christ: "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor

uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation" (Gal 5:17).

The writer to the Hebrews expounds on why the new covenant is better; the sacrifices under the old covenant didn't change the offerer: "According to this arrangement, gifts and sacrifices are offered that cannot perfect the conscience of the worshiper" (Heb 9:9 ESV). Conversely, the blood of the new covenant makes our consciences like new (Heb 9:14). In the new covenant, we are to be "living sacrifices", transformed by minds that have been made new (Rom 12:1-2). This new mind makes us new people: "...be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and that you put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness" (Eph 4:23-24). The new covenant is life-giving, changing the heart (2 Cor 3:3-6). To participate in the cup is to embrace the goal of the new covenant: "I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts."

The New Covenant and the Kingdom

Jesus also uses the word "new" (*kainos*) in relation to the cup in the kingdom:

Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new [*kainos*] covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new [*kainos*] with you in My Father's kingdom." (Matt 26:27-29)

The kingdom is frequently described in the context of being "new" [*kainos*]:

- "Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Pet 3:13).
- "Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell

with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.' Then He who sat on the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new'" (Rev 21:1-5).

The cup of the new covenant looks forward to a time when we, through God's grace, will be completely changed people (1 Cor 15:50-56), living in a transformed world, where all things are different and better. We follow Christ's example when we drink the cup and yearn to drink it "new" in his kingdom.

The Covenant is Everlasting (Aionios)

We have seen that the new covenant represents the confirmation and extension of ancient promises made to Abraham and David; how then is the covenant represented by the cup "everlasting"? The writer to the Hebrews says that the covenant represented by the blood is an "everlasting [*aionios*] covenant" (Heb 13:20). *Aionios* is an interesting word. Barclay⁴⁷ states that:

We need to be specially careful in our interpretation of the word. Simply to take it as meaning lasting forever is not enough...*Aionios* is the Greek word of eternity as opposed to and contrasted with time. It is the word of deity as opposed to and contrasted with humanity. It is the word which can only really be applied to God.

It is a word that means being outside of time, a state that Paul says applies uniquely to God, "who alone has immortality" (1 Tim 6:16). God is everlasting, and so is His plan for humankind to have a right relationship with Him. In terms of the everlasting covenant, just as God has always existed, so too has His arrangement for human beings to become part of His family. I think that this is what Peter was driving at when he wrote: "by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers [*koinonos*] of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Pet 1:4). The great promises to Abraham and

⁴⁷ William Barclay, *New Testament Words* (Westminster: John Knox, 2000)

David, foreshadowed by Genesis 3:15, were fulfilled in Christ. As a result, we are now partakers with Christ, especially when we gather in fellowship around the cup. Consequently, in the kingdom, we will be partakers with Christ of the Divine nature.

In Hebrews, we see the impact of the *aionios* covenant. There is *aionios* salvation: "...though He was a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered. And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal [*aionios*] salvation to all who obey Him" (Heb 5:8-9). This is a reminder that the cup of trial is also a part of the everlasting covenant, both for Christ and for us.

There are other profound impacts: *aionios* redemption and *aionios* inheritance: "Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal [*aionios*] redemption... that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal [*aionios*] inheritance" (Heb 9:12-15). The eternal "redemption" uses a word that means the price paid to free a slave. Paul uses *aionios* to describe how we are set free in the new covenant: "But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting [*aionios*] life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is [*aionios*] eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom 6:22-23). The eternal "inheritance" further reinforces our family relationship with God. Peter further describes the inheritance that we have as a result of being reborn into God's family: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you" (1 Pet 1:3-4). The inheritance is not only eternal; it is incorruptible, it is undefiled, and it does not fade away.

Taking Up the Covenant Cup

Whenever we take up the covenant cup, we are simultaneously partaking of something both "new" and "everlasting". The covenant is the foundation of our relationship with God as His children and heirs. The covenant is the way that we know God through Christ. Taking up

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the covenant cup renews our commitment to be new and transformed people in Christ. The covenant cup also represents God's everlasting purpose in creating His own people who will spend eternity with Him as partakers of the Divine nature. Drinking the covenant cup celebrates a relationship whose purpose is a better and different life now and, in the future, eternal life in the Kingdom: "And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us an understanding, that we may know Him who is true; and we are in Him who is true, in His Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God and eternal life" (1 John 5:20).

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Lord's Table

“...you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons.”
(1 Cor 10:21)

The “Lord's Table” is a ubiquitous phrase in our community of faith. Although the phrase is used only once (1 Cor 10:21) in connection with the Bread and Cup, we use it frequently as a community. As we have seen in earlier chapters, the table is a Biblical symbol for a relationship. The Lord's Table represents a covenant relationship between God, Jesus, and those who have been baptized into Christ's saving name⁴⁸. Just as we recognize that God established the relationship with us by graciously making us a part of His family, we recognize that the Table is God's, not ours.

Early in the development of our community (1854), we defined the Lord's Table in just this way:

Being the Lord's Table and not the table of the Association, all of good report within the city or without it, who, believing the gospel of the kingdom, have been immersed, are cordially invited to worship with us; the only privileges withheld being a participation in the direction of our

⁴⁸ The Lord's Supper is a celebration of God's covenant. Therefore, defining the celebration with non-Biblical terms such as “closed table” and “open table” misses God's fundamental purpose in creating His children through a covenant. The Bible is clear that partaking in the Bread and Cup is exclusively reserved for those who believe the gospel and have become participants in the covenant through baptism.

affairs, and speech without previous invitation⁴⁹.

In its earliest days, our community of faith strongly identified the Lord's Supper with the Passover⁵⁰. Therefore, it was logical (and, more importantly, Biblical) to view ownership of the two events in the same way. It is the "Lord's Passover" (Exod 12:11) in the same way that it is the "the Lord's table" (1 Cor 10:21).

The Table is owned by God, not the members of the community. Therefore, a seat at the Table is determined by one's covenant relationship with God through Christ rather than one's relationship with community members. To share in the Table, one must also believe the gospel and be baptized in accordance with gospel teaching. The Lord's Table symbolizes a relationship with Christ, and one cannot have a relationship without first having requisite knowledge of the other. To participate in the Lord's Table, one must be "of good report" (i.e., translating from the Victorian prose of 1854, "trying to live a repentant and Godly life"). The definition acknowledges that there will, of course, be sinners at the Table; however, those sinners will be engaged in humble and repentant self-examination. Implicit in this definition is the belief that if one partakes of the Table in an unworthy manner, then one does not negatively impact the Table or the others participating in the Table. As Paul asserts, the only impact is self-condemnation (1 Cor 11:27-31).

The Biblical Meaning of the Lord's Table

In the Old Testament, the very first occurrence of "table" (Hebrew *shulchan*) is in reference to the table for the showbread. Symbolically, the table can be used to describe the assurance of God's care (e.g., Psa 23:5; Job 36:16; Psa 78:19). The table is a symbol of fellowship and community (e.g., 2 Sam 9:7), especially in the context of a family: "Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine in the very heart of your house, your children like olive plants all around your table" (Psa 128:3).

On the night he was betrayed, Christ emphasized that his Table is for

⁴⁹ John Thomas, "Constitution of the Royal Association of Believers", 1854

⁵⁰ As noted in *Elpis Israel*, "The bread and wine of 'the Lord's supper' are the remains of the Passover, which are to be shared by the circumcised of heart and ears, until Christ comes in power and great glory."

everyone bound to God through covenant, even Judas: "But behold, the hand of My betrayer is with Me on the table" (Luke 22:21). On that evening, Christ connected his Table to the fellowship of suffering now with fellowship in the kingdom: "...you are those who have continued with Me in My trials. And I bestow upon you a kingdom, just as My Father bestowed one upon Me, that you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Luke 22:28-30). The Table provides an opportunity for us to really know Christ and to comprehend the magnitude of his work.

After his resurrection, Christ continues to use his Table to connect to his disciples: "Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him" (Luke 24:30-31). The imagery of "eyes were opened" is a clear allusion to Adam and Eve in Genesis 3:7. When the first couple's eyes were opened, they understood the impact of their sin; when we come to Christ's Table, our eyes are opened to see the impact of Christ's work: "For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous" (Rom 5:19).

Throughout his ministry, Christ emphasized that his Table meant fellowship and community. The gospel of Luke provides multiple examples of this emphasis. The meal at Levi's house shows that Christ's table is for repentant sinners:

And their scribes and the Pharisees complained against His disciples, saying, "Why do You eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" Jesus answered and said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance." (Luke 5:30-32)

The meal at Simon's house (Luke 7) demonstrates that Christ's table is composed of two kinds of sinners: repentant ones who appreciate the price of forgiveness and unrepentant ones who don't really understand forgiveness. The meal at Zaccheus' house (Luke 19) has a similar message: there are two kinds of sinners at the table, those who know they are lost without Christ and those who don't.

The Table Represents Relationships

Paul tells the Corinthian ecclesia that participating in the Lord's Table is "partaking" (*metecho*) (1 Cor 10:21). As we have discussed in other chapters, *metecho* means to "eat together" and has the strong sense of "sharing" (as in Heb 2:14). So, Paul states, when we come together to remember Christ, we are sharing around a "table" (*trapeza* in Greek). The word "table" is so connected with eating that the word is used several times as a symbol for eating (Matt 15:27; Mark 7:28; Luke 16:21; Acts 6:2; Acts 16:34). Most importantly for our study, Christ uses *trapeza* twice to refer to the sharing of food and drink at his table (Luke 22:21, 30). *Trapeza* occurs fifteen times in the New Testament and seventy-nine times in the Septuagint, where it is most frequently used to refer to the showbread table (as does Heb 9:2).

Paul emphasizes how the concepts of fellowship and the table were interwoven. He tells the Corinthian ecclesia that they have to pick one table: either the Lord's Table or the table of "demons" or idols (1 Cor 10:20-21). Paul acknowledges that, although idols aren't real (1 Cor 10:19; 1 Cor 8:4), the associations with them had real consequences. In particular, the associations that idols had with sexual immorality and drunkenness had no place in a disciple's life. The table symbolized close personal relationships, and Paul continued to remind the Corinthians that they had to choose between a relationship with Christ and a relationship with worldly things:

Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? (2 Cor 6:14-16)

The image of yoking neatly captures the meaning that "table" had for believers in the first century. The table was for people joined together by a common purpose.

In the Greco-Roman world, *trapeza* didn't just mean the place where communal meals were enjoyed. The word also meant a place of banking and exchange (e.g., Matt 21:12; Mark 11:15; Luke 19:23; John 2:15). Paul plays on this meaning when he uses the words "examine" (*dokimazo*, 1 Cor 11:28) and "approved" (*dokimos*, 1 Cor 11:19) in reference to actions at the Lord's Table because these words relate to the authenticity of metals and coins found on the moneychangers'

tables.

As we can see, when the Jewish disciples of the first century came to the Lord's Table, they would have made many meaningful connections to the concept of "table", beyond a place where communal meals were shared. They would have connected the table to the Bread of the Presence and its myriad of deep meanings. They would have felt that the table represented God's care. All disciples—Jew and Gentile alike—would have seen the Lord's Table as a symbol of fellowship and community. For all the cultures of the Mediterranean world, the table represented the trust engendered by deep personal relationships.

The Table of the Lord: Connections to Malachi

Paul used the phrase "Lord's table" in the context of rebuking unacceptable attitudes and behaviors at the Lord's Supper: "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's Table and of the table of demons" (1 Cor 10:21). Paul's readers would have connected immediately to a passage in Malachi, where the prophet condemns the people's behavior and attitude when worshipping God:

"You offer defiled food on My altar,
But say,
'In what way have we defiled You?'
By saying,
'The table of the Lord is contemptible.'
And when you offer the blind as a sacrifice,
Is it not evil?
And when you offer the lame and sick,
Is it not evil?
Offer it then to your governor!
Would he be pleased with you?
Would he accept you favorably?"
Says the Lord of hosts. (Mal 1:7-8)

The Hebrew word translated "contemptible" is *baza*, and it describes some significantly bad behavior:

- Esau despising his birthright (Gen 25:34)

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- Persons committing presumptuous sins (Num 15:31)
- Goliath despising David (1 Sam 17:42)
- Michal despising David (2 Sam 6:16)
- David despising God in the matter of Bathsheba (2 Sam 12:10)
- The people despising Christ (Psa 22:6; Isa 53:3)

All of these examples have a common theme: the elevation of self and the denigration of either God or His plan or His chosen people. The Corinthian ecclesia was making the Lord's Table contemptible by focusing on their own desires rather than making spiritual sacrifices that glorified God and Jesus.

Paul also pointed to Malachi's condemnation of the people for defiling the Lord's Table:

"But you profane it,
In that you say,
'The table of the Lord is defiled;
And its fruit, its food, is contemptible.'
You also say,
'Oh, what a weariness!
And you sneer at it,"
Says the Lord of hosts.
"And you bring the stolen, the lame, and the sick;
Thus you bring an offering!
Should I accept this from your hand?"
Says the Lord. (Mal 1:12-13).

Some members of the Corinthian ecclesia were defiling the Lord's Table through their belief in their own superiority, a belief that created factions within the body. The superior attitude embodied in "Oh, what a weariness" that Malachi castigates is equally apparent in Paul's reprimand:

For first of all, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you, and in part I believe it. For there must also be factions among you, that those who are approved may be recognized among you. Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk. What! Do you

not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and shame those who have nothing? (1 Cor 11:18-22)

One writer asserts that the act of causing division creates defilement: "Believers therefore form the 'throne room' of the God of the Universe when they unite with their fellow believers. Anything that creates a rift in the ecclesia defiles God's sanctuary."⁵¹ Ultimately, we cause the Lord's Table to be defiled when we act as if the Table is ours, not the Lord's. The Lord's Table is not a vehicle to serve our needs; it is a place of worship to glorify God and His Son. In 1854, we recognized that the Biblical teaching is clear: we are invitees to the Table, not its owners. As a community, we must ask ourselves if we have moved away from this clear Bible teaching.

⁵¹ Michael Ashton, *The Challenge of Corinthians* (Birmingham: CMPA, 2006/Electronic version 2018)

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Marriage Supper of the Lamb

“This is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many. Assuredly, I say to you, I will no longer drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.”

(Mark 14:25)

In the institution of the Lord's Supper, the idea of two cups is both mentioned explicitly (e.g., Luke 22:17, 20) and implied by Christ's promise to drink “new” in the Kingdom (Matt 26:27-29; Mark 14:23-25). The symbolism of two cups is in keeping with the profound symbolism of Christ's relationship with his followers: bridegroom and bride (Eph 5:22-32). The Twelve gathered around Jesus would have recognized the symbolism of the two cups as pointing to the two cups that were an essential part of the wedding ceremony process:

- The *erusin* (betrothal) cup.
- The *nisuin* (when the couple begin living together) cup.

There was usually a span of three to twelve months between the two cups. From the *erusin* cup forward, the woman and man were considered to be married to each other, although they did not live together nor have sexual relations until after the *nisuin* cup.

The Betrothal (erusin or kidushin)

In contemporary Western culture, there is a significant difference between the engagement and the wedding ceremony. Today, the engagement is the “promise” of the marriage; however, the marriage

doesn't begin until the wedding ceremony. For the Jewish people living under the Mosaic Law, there was no difference; legally, the marriage began with the engagement ceremony, symbolized by the *erusin* cup. Once the *erusin* cup had been taken up, the union of bride and groom could only be dissolved by death or divorce. As reflected in the betrothal of God's people, the *erusin* cup begins an everlasting covenant: "I will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in righteousness and justice, in loving kindness and mercy; I will betroth you to Me in faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord" (Hos 2:19-20). The idea of "knowing God" is a resounding affirmation of the new covenant: "No more shall every man teach his neighbor, and every man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for they all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them, says the Lord" (Jer 31:34).

At the betrothal, there were two blessings given over the cup. The first was the sanctification blessing: "Blessed are You, the Lord our God, King of the Universe, Creator of the fruit of the vine." This is the same blessing as the first of the four Passover cups, and this context explains Jesus' reference to the fruit of the vine: "But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom" (Matt 26:29). Then there is a second blessing for the couple, after which the bride and groom share a drink from the cup.

During the ceremony, the marriage covenant is formalized and the bride price is exchanged. This practice is referenced in Exodus 22:16-17; usually, the bride price was a material possession of value, but in David's case, it was the destruction of Saul's enemies (1 Sam 18:25). Christ, David's Son, also had a bride price comprised of the enemy's destruction: "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb 2:14). As part of a lengthy discussion on marriage, Paul reminds us that in our relationship with Christ we "were bought with a price" (1 Cor 7:23).

The Time between the Two Cups

For both the bride and groom, the period between the two cups was a time of preparation. The bride worked on preparing her clothing, while the groom worked on ensuring that a living space was ready. The bride's clothing and ornaments were supposed to be a treasured memory: "Can a virgin forget her ornaments, or a bride her attire?" (Jer 2:32). The bride and her family were to provide the clothing and jewelry. Isaiah shows us that Christ provides these things for his bride: "I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, he has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels" (Isa 61:10). Because the bride of Christ has been made righteous through him (2 Cor 5:21), we are arrayed in appropriate clothing for the marriage supper of the Lamb: "'Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.' And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints" (Rev 19:7-8; see also Rev 21:2).

The groom's main tasks were to ensure that preparations for the wedding supper were made and that a suitable living space was available for the couple. We know that Christ is preparing the marriage supper (Rev 19:9). On the night he was betrayed, Christ uses the imagery of the groom preparing the needed housing and returning to get his bride: "In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:2-3).

It is worth noting that the most information that we have about Mary and Joseph's marriage occurs between the two cups of the marriage ceremony (Matt 1:18-25; Luke 1:27; Luke 2:5). Because the marriage began at betrothal, Joseph sought to divorce Mary when it became apparent that she was pregnant, a course of action that required Divine intervention to stop. It appears that Mary and Joseph had the *nisuin* ceremony sometime after Jesus was born. Given their flight to Egypt (and subsequent exile) it seems unlikely that Mary and Joseph enjoyed the typical joyous seven-day *nisuin* celebration with family and friends of Nazareth.

There is a powerful message for us in the faithful example of Mary and Joseph. They were between the two cups of marriage, waiting for the appearance of Jesus. Their marriage supper was delayed, and they suffered significant trials between the *erusin* cup and the *nisuin* cup as they waited patiently for Christ's appearance. Jesus metaphorically equates his return to a birth after hard labor (John 16:21-22) and states that labor pains are the signs of the nearness of his return (Matt 24:8), a metaphor that Paul takes up: "For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they say, 'Peace and safety!' then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon a pregnant woman" (1 Thess 5:2-3).

We are between the cup of betrothal and the cup shared at the marriage supper of the Lamb. Paul makes clear our status as being between the cup of betrothal and the cup of marriage: "For I have betrothed you to one husband that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ" (2 Cor 11:2). Joseph's faithful example shows us how to act in such a time; Joseph's compassion and forgiveness motivated him to ensure that Mary did not become "a public example [*paradeigmatizo*]" (Matt 1:19). The only other time that *paradeigmatizo* occurs is in relation to how our actions can make Christ a public example: "...they fall away...since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame [*paradeigmatizo*]" (Heb 6:6). Our actions, in this time between the cups, can glorify Christ or put him to an open shame.

The Nisuin Cup

Edersheim⁵² provides a vivid image of the events surrounding the *nisuin* cup ceremony in first century Israel. The sequence of events was as follows:

- On the evening of the actual marriage, the bride was led from her parents' home to her husband's home.
- The procession from the two homes typically occurred in the evening and was marked by music.

⁵² Alfred Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (McLean: Macdonald, n.d.)

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- The bride was accompanied by her friends, who carried torches, or lamps on poles.
- When she arrived at her new home, the bride was led to her husband. The bride and groom wore garlands, heard the words of the Rabbi that confirmed the marriage covenant (e.g., “Take her according to the Law of Moses and of Israel,”), shared a cup of wine, and signed the *kethubah* (i.e., marriage contract).
- The friends of the bridegroom led the couple to the marriage chamber, where the marriage was consummated.
- Once the bride and groom emerged from the marriage chamber, the marriage supper began.
- The marriage supper lasted for several days, including blessings and music, and lots of wine.

The community rejoiced with the new couple. However, the community also recognized that this ceremony was a profound allegory of their relationship with their God. Edersheim comments on the Rabbinical teaching of Christ's day: “To use the bold allegory of the times, God Himself had spoken the words of blessing over the cup at the union of our first parents, when Michael and Gabriel acted as groomsmen, and the Angelic choir sang the wedding hymn.”⁵³

In Ephesians 5, Paul connects the celebration of the Lord's Supper with the celebratory union of bride and groom. He discusses the ecclesia's public worship as an introduction to the relationship between husband and wife and Christ and the church: “And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks [eucharisteo] always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, submitting to one another in the fear of God” (Eph 5:18-21). Consumption of wine, communal rejoicing, and music were an integral part of both the marriage ceremony and the Thanksgiving. However, in both circumstances, drunkenness was condemned.

Continuing his allegorical teaching in Ephesians 5, Paul connects

⁵³ Alfred Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (McLean: Macdonald, n.d.)

these elements of the marriage supper to the roles of the marriage relationship that would have been outlined in the *kethubah*: “Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is head of the wife, as also Christ is head of the church; and He is the Savior of the body. Therefore, just as the church is subject to Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for her” (Eph 5:22-25). Paul is teaching us that understanding the roles in the marriage relationship provides us with deep insights into our relationship with Christ. Paul concludes his allegorical teaching by using the imagery of the wedding night to further describe the relationship of Christ and the church:

...that He might sanctify and cleanse her with the washing of water by the word, that He might present her to Himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, but that she should be holy and without blemish...For we are members of His body, of His flesh and of His bones. “For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh.” This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church. (Eph 5:26-31)

The ritual cleansing of the bride, the sanctification of the couple through the cup, the exchanging of promises contained in the marriage covenant, and the union of bodies all speak of the wedding night.

The First Sign and the Last Sign

In his teaching, Jesus frequently used the imagery of the wedding ceremony. He extended the imagery that John the Baptist began: “You yourselves bear me witness that I said, ‘I am not the Christ,’ but, ‘I have been sent before Him.’ He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom’s voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled” (John 3:28-29). Christ contextualizes the joy that his disciples have in his presence as similar to the “friends of the bridegroom” (Matt 9:15). In his teaching, Christ paid particular attention to the behavior of wedding guests, commanding humility (Luke 14:7-11), prompt attendance, and appropriate attire (Matt 22:1-14) at the wedding feast.

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He also used the imagery of the wedding night to teach about appropriate preparation for his return (Matt 25:1-13).

It is not a coincidence that Jesus' first sign occurs at a wedding feast (John 2). We can infer the following from the wedding in Cana:

- As an invited guest, Jesus must have known either the bride or the groom. Mary must have known the families so well that she was seen as an authoritative and influential person (i.e., one who could direct the people serving at the wedding).
- The host family had extensively prepared for the ritual cleansings prescribed by the Rabbis, providing an abundance of water for cleansing.
- The host family had not prepared the requisite amount of wine.

It is natural to think back to one's own wedding when attending a wedding ceremony. Therefore, we can infer that Mary was perhaps thinking of her own experience and was concerned that this wedding celebration proceed smoothly: "Jesus said to her, 'Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me?'" (John 2:4).

In the first miracle of his ministry, Jesus takes an external (the water for ritual cleansing) and makes it internal (the wine that is consumed). The miracle introduces a key theme of Jesus' teaching: the exterior is unimportant, but the interior is most important: "But those things which proceed out of the mouth come from the heart, and they defile a man. For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, and blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man, but to eat with unwashed hands does not defile a man" (Matt 15:18-20). Jesus expands this teaching in John 6, where he articulates the necessity for disciples to internalize his character: "Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed" (John 6:54-55). Jesus finalizes this teaching when he took the cup and said, "Drink from it, all of you. For this is My blood of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins" (Matt 26:27-28). The wine of the first miracle introduces the concept of transformation that is memorialized in the Lord's Supper.

Filling the wedding cups with the best wine was Jesus' first sign. It is

also his last sign. The master of the wedding feast's comment—"Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!" (John 2:10)—connects us to the feast of the best-aged wines that describe the vision of the Kingdom in Isaiah: "And in this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all people, a feast of choice pieces, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of well-refined wines on the lees...He will swallow up death forever, and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces..." (Isa 25:6-8). The end of death and the wiping of tears are used to describe the marriage supper of the Lamb:

Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away...' (Rev 21:2-4)

Reflecting on the Two Cups

As we partake in the Lord's Supper's cup, we recognize our status as the bride of Christ. The cup reminds us that we are betrothed by covenant, that the groom has gone away, and that he will return for us. As we focus on making ourselves ready for the Bridegroom, we look forward to taking up the cup in celebration at the marriage supper. We understand that, although we are living between the two cups now, Christ will return soon.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Who Is the Greatest?

"Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest."

(Luke 22:24)

Our sinful flesh can cause us to use the Lord's Table as a way to view our relationships with each other in a competitive manner. To use Paul's metaphor, we can be tempted to believe that some parts of the One Body are better than others, or even that some parts of Christ's body are not needed at all:

But now indeed there are many members, yet one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unrepresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it... (1 Cor 12:20-24)

Sadly, the Twelve succumbed to this temptation on the night Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper.

The Twelve who gathered around Christ at his table were tempted to use the institution of the Lord's Supper to determine who amongst them was the "greatest". Despite the importance of Jesus' message and the intensely emotional nature of his teaching, the Twelve took their focus away from Christ and placed it on their own self-

aggrandizement. Although Christ showed them that a leader is a servant, the disciples ignored the perfect example of greatness right in front of them to focus their attention on each other (Matt 20:20-28).

The disciples turned the Bread and Cup from a time designed to celebrate restored relationships into a time of contention. Their preoccupation with their status transformed a time of collective joy into a time of individual striving. Their flesh convinced them into thinking that they were strong in themselves, when in reality they were vulnerable to acts of faithlessness, including denying or betraying Christ. At the Lord's Table, can we make the same mistakes that the Twelve did by not focusing on Christ's greatness and instead seeking to establish our own?

Places at the Table as a Sign of Status

In Christ's day, the seating arrangements were indicators of status. Christ warned against those who sought the best seats at feasts (Luke 20:46), and the first century ecclesia struggled with this issue as well (Jas 2:3). This striving for status manifested itself when Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. By piecing together John's account and historical records, we have a clear idea of where participants were placed at the Lord's Supper. The place setting for Christ's celebration of the Passover had three couches (or sets of pillows and mats) arranged in an upside-down U formation. The food and drink were placed in a low-lying table in the center of the upside-down U. The custom was to eat while reclining, propped up on one's left elbow, and reaching for the food with one's right hand. Participants faced the table with their legs furthest away from the table.

There were four seats at the table that denoted greater or lesser honor. The host sat in the middle of one bank of couches, with the guest of honor placed on his left. The second-highest place was to the host's right. Immediately opposite the second-highest place was the lowest place. This place was considered a position of service.

From the accounts in John and Matthew, we see that Christ was in the host's place, Judas Iscariot was in the place of honor, John was in the next highest place, and Peter was in the lowest place. From Matt 26:23-25, we can infer that Judas was next to Christ, as their dialogue

went unheard by the others. Peter observed the interaction from across the table and asked John, who was on the side of Jesus, what Christ had said (John 13:23-24). Peter, in the lowest spot, was Christ's first stop as he went around the table washing his disciples' feet (John 13:5-17).

It should not surprise us that Judas was in the place of honor. The Messianic Psalms show that Judas was to Christ as Ahithophel was to David. In John 13:18, Christ applies Psalm 41:8 to Judas: "Even my closest friend whom I trusted, the one who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me" (GW). Psalm 55:12-14 captures Christ's feelings about Judas:

For it is not an enemy who reproaches me;
Then I could bear it.
Nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me;
Then I could hide from him.
But it was you, a man my equal,
My companion and my acquaintance.
We took sweet counsel together,
And walked to the house of God in the throng.

Judas was Christ's friend, and yet he tragically betrayed the Lord. Christ knew from the beginning who would betray him (John 6:64, 71), but that did not minimize his pain at the betrayal.

The highest (Judas) and the lowest (Peter) seats at the table represent the range of those partaking of the Lord's Table. While the participants coveted certain places at the Table, to Christ, each place was equally valued and important. The first century ecclesia seemed to struggle with the same preoccupation with position as the Twelve. James condemns the idea that some places are more equal than others:

My brethren, do not hold the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with partiality. For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, "You sit here in a good place," and say to the poor man, "You stand there," or, "Sit here at my footstool," have you not shown partiality among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? (Jas 2:1-4)

We all have the same status at the Lord's Table: sinners redeemed through grace and mercy through Christ (Eph 2:8-9; Titus 3:5). We are all unprofitable servants.

Changing the Conversation from Christ's Sacrifice to their Own Status

Throughout his ministry, Christ clearly told the Twelve that he would be betrayed and killed. The gospels show the progression of Jesus' revelation and the Twelve's responses:

- In Galilee, they are deeply saddened, confused, and scared when he tells them that he would be betrayed and killed (Matt 17:22-23; Mark 9:30-32; Luke 9:44-45). Christ tells them to "Let these words sink down into your ears" (Luke 9:44).
- As Christ drew closer to Jerusalem, he adds the detail that the betrayal will be to the chief priests and scribes (Matt 20:17-19)
- During the Passover meal, Christ adds a final detail that shocks and saddens the Twelve: One of the Twelve will betray him (Matt 26:20-24; Mark 14:18-21; Luke 22:20-22; John 13:18-21).

The disciples' response is immediate. They question themselves, and they question each other. They turn to Christ for the validation that they would not betray him. In all but Judas' case, the immediate reaction is genuine self-examination. Even though they loved Christ, they realized that their hearts were desperately wicked and unknowable (Jer 17:9).

Who Is the Greatest?

At the Lord's Table, we see the individual members of the Twelve asserting their claim to be the greatest. Peter claims that only he will remain faithful; therefore, Peter is saying that he is the greatest. Judas lays claim to the best seat because he was the greatest of the Twelve: "But the chief place next to the Master would be that to His left, or above Him. In the strife of the disciples, which should be accounted the greatest, this had been claimed, and we believe it to have been actually occupied, by Judas."⁵⁴ The explosive argument about who

⁵⁴ Alfred Edersheim, *Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah* (McLean:

was the greatest disciple appears to have been detonated by the accusations that were flying back and forth as the disciples tried to determine the betrayer's identity: "Then they began to question among themselves, which of them it was who would do this thing" (verse 23).

The word used to describe the disciples' conversation is significant: "Now there was also a dispute [*philoneikia*] among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest" (verse 24). The word occurs only here, and armchair Greek scholars will note *philo* ("lover of") as one part of the word. It carries the sense of someone who loves to contend or argue. Christ's troubling revelations led the disciples to revisit a favorite topic, one in which they loved to indulge: determining who was the greatest amongst them.

Throughout their time with Christ, the disciples contended with each other. Although they tried to keep their argument from Jesus, he knew their hearts.

In Luke 9, we read: "Then a dispute [*dialogismos*] arose among them as to which of them would be greatest. And Jesus, perceiving the thought [*dialogismos*] of their heart, took a little child and set him by Him" (verses 46-47). Although they stubbornly refused to admit that they were arguing about their status (Mark 9:34), Christ addressed the error of their thinking through a powerful object lesson.

As time progressed, attempts to obtain a favored place with Christ became more overt. James and John (and their mother) were transparent in their striving to be the greatest:

Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to Him, saying, "Teacher, we want You to do for us whatever we ask." And He said to them, "What do you want Me to do for you?" They said to Him, "Grant us that we may sit, one on Your right hand and the other on Your left, in Your glory." (Mark 10:35-37)

Predictably, when the other ten heard about this, they were very angry. Christ responds by stating that the way the world practices leadership is not the way he practices leadership. To be great is to serve.

Christ uses the exact same reasoning when the dispute erupts again

at the Lord's Supper:

Now there was also a dispute among them, as to which of them should be considered the greatest. And He said to them, "The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them, and those who exercise authority over them are called 'benefactors.' But not so among you; on the contrary, he who is greatest among you, let him be as the younger, and he who governs as he who serves. For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves. (Luke 22:24-27)

Jesus demonstrates that leaders must approach the Lord's Table with humility and a commitment to serve the other members.

How is Leadership Enacted at the Lord's Table?

Let's summarize what we know about leadership at the Lord's Table; specifically, what it is and what it is not:

What Leadership at the Lord's Table Is	What Leadership at the Lord's Table Is Not
Humility	Arrogance
Service	Self-interest
Bringing the members of Christ's body together	Dividing the members of Christ's body
Following Christ's commands	Relying on our own judgment

The leaders in the Corinthian ecclesia neither established nor exemplified Christ's expectations for his table; as a result, it was unrecognizable as the Lord's Table: "Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper" (1 Cor 11:20). Several passages in the Old Testament describe the impact of leaders on the Lord's Table. In Isaiah 28:7-8, the behavior of priests and prophets creates tables "full of vomit and filth" (KJV). In Malachi 1:6-13, God's table is defiled and profaned because of the priests' actions and attitudes.

A Leadership Task: "Put Away From Yourself the Evil Person"

Leaders have a Divinely appointed responsibility regarding other members' participation in the Lord's Supper. It is true that Paul directed leaders in the ecclesia to judge other members at the Lord's Supper: "For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside? But those who are outside God judges. Therefore 'put away from yourselves the evil person'" (1 Cor 5:12-13). The Lord's Supper is definitely a part of Paul's direction: "But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioners—**not even to eat with such a person**" (1 Cor 5:11, **my emphasis**). Paul says "not to keep company with" [*synanamignymi*] some members. The Greek word literally means "do not mix together" and is used in 2 Thessalonians 3:14: "If anyone refuses to obey the command given above, mark that man, do not associate [*synanamignymi*] with him until he is ashamed of himself. I don't mean, of course, treat him as an enemy, but reprimand him as a brother" (Phillips). We see that the purpose of withholding a place at the Lord's Table is to bring about a change in the unrepentant member, not to ensure the purity of the Table. Paul is concerned about those who are living unrepentant lives of sin. He is not talking about members who sin, for every member sins (Rom 3:23); rather, he is talking about those who are leading a sinful and unrepentant way of life.

Members of Christ's body—who are unrepentant about their sins—have given up a spot at the family table. The outstanding Biblical example is the lost son of Luke 15:

Then He said: "A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the portion of goods that falls to me.' So he divided to them his livelihood. And not many days after, the younger son gathered all together, journeyed to a far country, and there wasted his possessions with prodigal living." (Verses 11-13)

The unrepentant son leaves the family and lives a life characterized by the Greek word *asótós*. This word literally means to live "not saving"; its root is the verb *sozo*, which is used most frequently to describe human beings being saved: "for the Son of Man has come to seek and to save [*sozo*] that which was lost" (Luke 19:10). The younger son

wasn't interested in "saving"; he was lost. The parable narrates the son's repentance (i.e., wanting to be saved), which results in his restoration to the father's table.

In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul lists the unrepentant behaviors that preclude eating together (*synesthiō*) with that person. This Septuagint uses this word to show a separation or disruption in fellowship: "So they set him a place by himself, and them by themselves, and the Egyptians who ate with him [*synesthiō*] by themselves; because the Egyptians could not eat food [*synesthiō*] with the Hebrews, for that is an abomination to the Egyptians" (Gen 43:32).

When faced by members who are living unrepentant lives devoted to sin, ecclesial leaders are commanded to refuse a member of Christ's body a place at the Lord's Table. What were the unrepentant behaviors that Paul commanded ecclesial leaders to address by not allowing participation in the Lord's Supper?

Behavior	Meaning
sexually immoral	<i> pornos</i> : a prostitute, metaphorically someone who habitually engages in sexual acts outside marriage
covetous	<i> pleonektes</i> : a greedy person
idolater	<i> eidololatrias</i> : an idol worshipper
reviler	<i> loidoros</i> : an abusive person
drunkard	<i> methusos</i> : an alcoholic
extortioner	<i> harpax</i> : someone who snatches away, usually a robber but used metaphorically in Matthew 7:15

Some of the behaviors that Paul lists are easily understood in a twenty-first century context. For example, unrepentant sexual immorality and unrepentant addiction to substances are axiomatic; ecclesial leaders act in accordance with Paul's direction in these areas. However, how should ecclesial leaders understand the other behaviors listed by Paul?

In Paul's writings, *pleonektes* and *eidololatrias* are connected to each

other (e.g., Eph 5:5). Looking at the way Paul uses these terms, the collective meaning of “covetous” and “idolater” in a twenty-first century context seems to be a way of life that prioritizes other things (e.g., the pursuit of wealth) to the detriment of one’s service to God and Christ. Today, ecclesial leaders are rightly cautious in these areas simply because idolatry in the twenty-first century is a matter of attitude, rather than overt worship as it was in the first century.

Similarly, *loidoros* and *harpax* have different manifestations in a twenty-first century context. The verb form of “reviler” (*loidoreó*) is consistently used to describe the slanderous approach taken by opponents of Christ (John 9:28; 1 Pet 2:23) and Paul (1 Cor 4:12). From this, we can infer that someone who is unrepentantly verbally abusive must have their behavior addressed by ecclesial leaders. In my experience, ecclesial leaders rarely, if ever, follow Paul’s direction in this area. This lack of action has resulted in a destructive tolerance of verbally abusive comments made in meetings, in correspondence, and in social media.

How are we to understand *harpax* or “extortion” in a twenty-first century context? To extort is to coerce someone through incentives or disincentives. As a community, we have an “open secret” regarding extortion: it is an established practice in some areas for speaking/teaching invitations to be extended or withheld as a way to exercise power. The terms of the extortion are clear: if you want to have a “career” as a speaker in the Christadelphian world, then you must fall in line on certain issues. Ecclesial leaders are reluctant to address this “open secret”, even in its most overt use. What does it say about our ecclesial community that some think that the allocation of teaching/speaking assignments is a useful vehicle for exercising political power and demonstrating who the “greatest” is?

There is one other kind of behavior that Paul demands that ecclesial leaders address. Paul excoriates those who create barriers to the Lord’s Table by adding additional teaching to the simple gospel message: “But avoid foolish disputes, genealogies, contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and useless. Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition, knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned” (Titus 3:9-11). The teaching of Scripture is clear: the Lord’s Table is only for those

who have believed the gospel and been baptized into Christ. However, from the ecclesia's inception until now, some have insisted on expanding upon the gospel essentials, creating controversy and division in the process, and excluding members from the Lord's Table. Just as the Twelve took the occasion of the first Lord's Supper as an opportunity to argue with each other in order to establish the greatest among them (Luke 22:24), some in our community have continued this pattern of behavior.

Many years ago, wise counsel was given to our community regarding this behavior:

This "doctrine of fellowship" (as it is called) is also carried to an excess never contemplated in apostolic prescription. I was called upon by a man in dead earnest who contended there were no such things as "first principles," and that every detail of truth, down even to the date of the expiry of the Papal 1260, should be insisted on as a condition of fellowship. Such outrageous extravagance would not be contended for by every extremist; but in principle, they are guilty of it when they insist on uncertain details, as well as true general principles.⁵⁵

Paul states that the desire for power is behind the behavior that connects participation at the Lord's Table "to an excess never contemplated in apostolic prescription":

Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple. (Rom 16:17-18)

"Such people serve their own belly"—Paul used this metaphor to describe those who seek to establish their own greatness at the Lord's Table by precluding others from participating.

Like Diotrefes, these leaders are motivated by their desire to be the greatest:

Diotrefes, who loves to have the preeminence among them, does not

⁵⁵ Robert Roberts, "True Principles and Uncertain Details; or, the Danger of Going Too Far in Our Demands on Fellow-Believers" *The Christadelphian* (May 1898)

receive us. Therefore, if I come, I will call to mind his deeds which he does, prating against us with malicious words. And not content with that, he himself does not receive the brethren, and forbids those who wish to, putting them out of the church. (3 John 9-10)

In Greek, Diotrephes is literally described as one “who loves to be first” (*philopróteuó*). The Lord’s Supper is indeed a “love feast” (Jude 1:12), but Diotrephes perverted the event by placing the love of power above the love of Christ.

The Table as a Snare

We have seen that ecclesial leaders have a responsibility regarding the Lord’s Table. When leaders use this responsibility as a way to serve themselves rather than Christ, this responsibility becomes a snare: “Let their table become a snare before them” (Psa 69:22). The leaders’ approach to fellowship (symbolized by the table) damaged the members of God’s family and themselves: “The table was a symbol of fellowship and prosperity and it was to become a snare to them.”⁵⁶

Paul quotes the passage in Romans 11:9 in the context of some Jewish members not accepting Gentile members, despite the latter being baptized and thus becoming part of spiritual Israel’s commonwealth and the covenants of promise.

Despite the lessons about “greatness” that he learned at the first Lord’s Supper, even Peter became ensnared (Gal 2:11-20). At Antioch, which was in many ways the center of the preaching campaign among the Gentiles, there were both Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. Those in the community of faith were impacted by Peter’s words and actions, particularly in the matter of Gentiles, where Peter’s direct revelation (and his subsequent personal testimony) about the Gentile inclusion into God’s family was tremendously impactful. Peter was celebrating the Lord’s Supper at the Antioch ecclesia with Gentile disciples when representatives from the circumcision fellowship appeared in town. As a leader of the first-century ecclesia, Peter was faced with an important decision: should he refuse the Gentiles a place at the Lord’s Table in light of the beliefs

⁵⁶ Dudley Fifield, *The Praises of Israel Volume One - Psalms 1–72* (Birmingham: CMPA, 2008/Electronic edition 2013)

of the new arrivals?

We can imagine Peter's decision-making process:

If I enable the Gentiles to have a place at the Lord's Table, I will upset those of the circumcision fellowship. The circumcision fellowship believes that they will be contaminated by the Gentiles' participation in the Lord's Table. If I upset those people, maybe all the progress that had been made towards Gentile inclusion will be undone. I am the apostle to the Jews, and I need the circumcision fellowship's support to be effective in that role.

So, Peter refused to fellowship Gentile Christians at Antioch.

Peter's decision was completely and unequivocally wrong. For a leader to refuse a place at the Lord's Table for purely political reasons was hypocrisy (verse 13). Peter failed to discern the Lord's Body when he denied members of Christ's body a place at the Lord's Table. Paul set Peter straight; he "withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed" (Gal 2:11). The use of the word "blamed" shows why Peter's behavior at the table was so egregious; the word means that Peter knew better (through personal experience and evidence) than to refuse believing Gentiles a place at the Lord's Table. Peter's actions resulted in the disfellowshipping of Gentile disciples. Sadly, Peter's hypocrisy was infectious, even ensnaring "beloved" and esteemed early Church leader Barnabas: "so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy" (Gal 2:13).

What can we learn from Peter's mistake and Paul's intervention? First, it is a serious offense to fail to discern the Lord's Body by withholding a rightful place at the Lord's Table. Second, this offense is contagious, leading others to sin in the same way. Third, we must intervene when we see participation in the Lord's Table being used to support factions rather than the entire Body of Christ.

Perhaps most importantly, we learn that membership in the Lord's Body is different from membership in factions or fellowships. People who believe the gospel, who are baptized into Christ, and who are living repentant lives are in the Body and thus have a place at the Lord's Table. Membership in fellowships or factions is determined by men; membership in the Body is determined by God through Christ.

Seated at the Lord's Table with Humility

The Lord's Table is a family table; it is not a social club where members get to decide who belongs; as one writer noted: "Brethren in Christ join a rich, loving, and generous community. It is brothers and sisters and mothers...which they are taught to be to each other. They are not invited to be censors and inspectors and policemen."⁵⁷

Ecclesial leaders have a great responsibility to serve the members of the community. If this service is motivated by loving concern for each member and expressed through humility, then ecclesial leaders are truly shepherds, not censors, not inspectors, not policemen.

Since its institution, the Lord's Supper has provided Christ's disciples with an opportunity to acknowledge their own shortcomings and to exalt Christ. It is not an opportunity to establish status or prominence or dominance in the body of Christ. The Lord's Supper is a time to demonstrate our love for Christ, not our love for striving or our love of being first.

⁵⁷ A.D. Norris, Peter, *Fisher of Men* (Birmingham: CMPA, 1972)

SECTION FOUR

Partaking

CHAPTER FIFTEEN	Giving Thanks
CHAPTER SIXTEEN	Remembering
CHAPTER SEVENTEEN	Take, Thank, Break, Give
CHAPTER EIGHTEEN	Eating Flesh and Drinking Blood
CHAPTER NINETEEN	Showing the Lord's Death
CHAPTER TWENTY	In an Unworthy Manner
CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE	Not Discerning the Lord's Body

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

Giving Thanks

“For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks [eucharesteo]...”

(1 Cor 11:23)

Jesus made “giving thanks” a key part of the Lord’s Supper. Recognizing how integral the idea of thanksgiving was to the Lord’s Supper, the first-century ecclesia called the ritual *eucharestia*, or “Thanksgiving”. The *Didache* (a kind of Ecclesial Guide for the first-century)⁵⁸ clearly refers to the Lord’s Supper as “Thanksgiving”:

Now concerning the Thanksgiving, thus give thanks. First, concerning the cup: We thank you, our Father, for the holy vine of David Your servant...And concerning the broken bread: We thank You, our Father, for the life and knowledge which You made known to us through Jesus Your Servant...But let no one eat or drink of your Thanksgiving, but they who have been baptized into the name of the Lord...

So intertwined was the connection between thanksgiving and the Lord’s Supper that one scholar asserts that the first-century ecclesia referred to it as the “Thank You Meal”⁵⁹. In this chapter, we will try to recapture the idea of thanksgiving that so characterized the practice of Christ’s institution of the Bread and Cup and its subsequent first-century ecclesial observances.

⁵⁸ *Didache*, earlychristianwritings.com/didache.html

⁵⁹ N.T. Wright, *The Meal Jesus Gave Us* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2015)

Thanksgiving as a First Principle

A fundamental principle of our relationship with God is to be thankful to Him. God expects us to be thankful to Him for everything, at all times: "...in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (1 Thess 5:18).

Thanksgiving is expected to be a part of everything: "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him" (Col 3:17). Thanksgiving is expected to be at all times: "...giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 5:20). To be thankful is our ongoing sacrifice to God through Christ: "Therefore by Him let us continually offer the sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, giving thanks to His name" (Heb 13:15). When we obey His commands to be thankful, we reap the benefits, not only in our relationship with Him and with His son, but also in all aspects of our lives.

God created us to be thankful. A quick web search demonstrates that scientific research has documented the impact of thankfulness, including:

- Improved relationships
- Increased happiness
- Increased empathy
- Increased physical health
- Increased mental health
- Improved sleep
- Increased resilience
- Increased willpower

To be thankful is to live a life of abundance, just as Christ did: "As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving" (Col 2:6).

What Does It Mean to Act with Thanksgiving?

When we think of acting with thanksgiving, what actions come to mind? Biblically, thanksgiving means to offer joyful praise. In both the Old and New Testaments, the word translated “thanks” is a synonym for “praise”, both having the sense of overflowing thanks, praise, and joy. In the Old Testament, *towdah* (“thanksgiving”) is derived from the verb *yadah* “to praise.” In the New Testament, *eucharestia* (“thanksgiving”) and its cognates are used interchangeably with *eulogia* (“praise”). The Lord’s Supper embodies the identification of thanksgiving with praise: “Is not the cup of thanksgiving [*eulogia*] for which we give thanks [*eulogeo*] a participation in the blood of Christ?” (1 Cor 10:16 NIV).

We offer joyful praise to God because of His abundant grace towards us. “Thanksgiving” (*eucharestia*) is composed of the root *charis*, or “grace”; this linguistic connection is preserved in our reference to prayers of thanks as “saying grace”. For Paul, grace and thanksgiving are two sides of the same coin: “For all things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God” (2 Cor 4:15). Our joyful praise at God’s grace connects us to God, to Christ, and to each other: “For what thanksgiving can we return to God for you, for all the joy that we feel for your sake before our God” (1 Thess 3:9 ESV).

Eucharestia is a fitting word to describe the Lord’s Supper. The linguistic roots of *eucharestia* are grace and joy. One writer⁶⁰ summed up these roots in this way:

The root word of *eucharisteo* is *charis*, meaning “grace.” Jesus took the bread and saw it as grace and gave thanks. He took the bread and knew it to be a gift and gave thanks. *Eucharisteo*, “thanksgiving”, envelopes the Greek word for grace, *charis*. But it also holds its derivative, the Greek word *chara*, meaning ‘joy.’ Charis. Grace. *Eucharisteo*. Thanksgiving. *Chara*. Joy.

To act with thanksgiving is to acknowledge God’s grace in our lives and to accept His many gifts with joy. To celebrate the Lord’s Supper with thanksgiving is to recognize everything that God has done, to see His Son (represented by the Bread and Wine) as His most precious

⁶⁰ Ann Voskamp, *One Thousand Gifts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010)

gift, and to rejoice in our place in God's family.

"In everything give thanks" is very challenging because every disciple's life is filled with painful trials. Yet even in adversity, we are called to be joyful. Scripture acknowledges how difficult this can be: "Now all discipline seems painful at the time, not joyful. But later it produces the fruit of peace and righteousness for those trained by it" (Heb 12:11 NET). James exhorts us to be joyful in trial, "Consider it pure joy, my brothers, when you are involved in various trials, because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance" (Jas 1:2-3 ISV). Throughout the Bible we see the symmetry of joy in trial being matched by joy in the kingdom, "But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed" (1 Pet 4:13 ESV). It is fitting that we give joyful thanks at the Lord's Supper, whose symbols represent faithful obedience in the face of the ultimate trial.

Towdah and Joyful Communal Worship

We are called as individuals to be joyful and thankful. However, *towdah* describes not only individual actions, but also describes collective actions. *Towdah* is frequently used in relation to joyful communal worship. Coming into God's presence, as part of a community of faith engaged in communal worship, is an act marked by thanksgiving: "Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving" (Psa 95:2). Thanksgiving is the commanded mindset for participating in the Temple services: "Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise. Be thankful to Him, and bless His name" (Psa 110:4). Thanksgiving is a special characteristic of the great feast days, such as Passover: "I will remember these things as I pour out my soul: how I used to walk with the crowd and lead it in a procession to God's house. I sang songs of joy and thanksgiving while crowds of people celebrated a festival" (Psa 42:4 GW).

Thanksgiving was a key feature of the communal worship engendered by Hezekiah's reformation (1 Chr 29:31) and Nehemiah's rebuilding (Neh 12:40). Communal worship in the kingdom is also characterized by thanksgiving: "For the Lord will comfort Zion, He will comfort all her waste places; He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert

like the garden of the Lord; joy and gladness will be found in it, Thanksgiving and the voice of melody" (Isa 51:3).

Eucharestia and Joyful Communal Worship

In the New Testament, *eucharestia* also describes individual and communal worship. Christ prefaces his thanksgiving at the Lord's Supper (Luke 22:17, 19) by expressing his unbridled joy at being with the Twelve in community: "With fervent desire [*epithumia*], I have desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer" (Luke 22:15). Jesus uses the word *epithumia* to describe his feelings about being with the Twelve and celebrating the New Passover. This word is usually translated as "lust" in the New Testament, but the word really means any intense longing, whether for good things or bad. Paul uses the word in the same way that Christ did in 1 Thessalonians 2: 17: "But we, brethren, having been taken away from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavored more eagerly to see your face with great desire."

In keeping with the example that Christ set, collective joy was to be a hallmark of the first-century ecclesia. The Breaking of Bread was characterized by *agalliasis*, or "extreme joy"⁶¹. In Acts 2:46, we read: "So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness [*agalliasis*] and simplicity of heart." Paul admonished the Ephesian ecclesia that their joyful communal worship needed no artificial help: "And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord, giving thanks [*eucharesteo*] always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph 5:18-21).

Paul gave the Colossian ecclesia a similar message about their collective worship being driven by thanksgiving: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in

⁶¹ James Strong, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2009)

the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks [*eucharesteo*] to God the Father through Him" (Col 3:16-17). A joyful communal meal, driven by thanksgiving, was a key element of the first century ecclesias. For the Jewish members of these ecclesias, this celebration would have evoked the thanksgiving offering.

The Thanksgiving Offering

The thanksgiving offering was the embodiment of *towdah* (Lev 7:12), and it ended with a unique communal meal that included the priests as well as the offerers (Deut 12:17-18). The thanksgiving offering was a kind of "peace" (or "fellowship") offering (Lev 3; Lev 7:11-34). It was also a voluntary sacrifice (Lev 22:29). We can easily see how the elements of the thanksgiving offering resonated in the practice of the Lord's Supper. The idea of "peace" is fundamental to the saving work of Christ highlighted in the Bread and Wine:

For He Himself is our peace, who has made both one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation, having abolished in His flesh the enmity, that is, the law of commandments contained in ordinances, so as to create in Himself one new man from the two, thus making peace, and that He might reconcile them both to God in one body through the cross, thereby putting to death the enmity. And He came and preached peace to you who were afar off and to those who were near. (Eph 2:14-17)

The concept of "fellowship" is self-evident in relation to the Lord's Supper; Paul equates both the cup and the bread with *koinonia* (or fellowship): "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion [*koinonia*] of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion [*koinonia*] of the body of Christ?" (1 Cor 10:16).

The thanksgiving sacrifice was a beautiful type fulfilled by Christ. Psalm 116 is both a Messianic Psalm and a Hallel Psalm. Jesus sang this Psalm as part of the Passover ceremony on the night he was betrayed. In this Psalm, Christ's sacrifice is portrayed as a thanksgiving offering, voluntary and precious:

What shall I render to the Lord?
For all His benefits toward me?

STUDIES IN THE LORD'S SUPPER

I will take up the cup of salvation,
And call upon the name of the Lord.
I will pay my vows to the Lord
Now in the presence of all His people.
Precious in the sight of the Lord
Is the death of His saints?
O Lord, truly I am Your servant;
I am Your servant, the son of Your maidservant;
You have loosed my bonds.
I will offer to You the sacrifice of thanksgiving,
And will call upon the name of the Lord. (Psa 116:12-17)

Christ's thankfulness for all the Father's goodness motivated him to take up the cup of sacrifice (John 18:11) that made salvation possible. In keeping with the type, a thanksgiving offering was often made after deliverance from illness or death: "Your vows are on me, God. I will give thank offerings to you. For you have delivered my soul from death, and prevented my feet from falling, that I may walk before God in the light of the living" (Psa 56:12-13 WEB). Christ's thanksgiving offering rested in the total assurance that he would be delivered from death after three days (Mark 10:33-34).

In addition to the "three days", Jonah was a type of Christ in his thanksgiving. A good example of this is Jonah's prayer while in the belly of the great fish: "But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is of the Lord" (Jonah 2:19)." Jesus' vow was to completely submit his will to the Father's: "And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and prayed, saying, 'Father, if it is Your will, take this cup away from Me; nevertheless not My will, but Yours, be done'" (Luke 22:41-42). This also underscores the integral role of prayer in the thanksgiving offering. As indicated from the Psalm 116 passage above (verses 13 and 17), calling on the name of the Lord is both the starting point and the culmination of the thanksgiving offering.

Psalm 50 neatly brings together the meaning of the thanksgiving offering for us: "If I were hungry, I would not tell you; for the world is Mine, and all its fullness. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer to God thanksgiving, and pay your vows to the Most High. Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you

shall glorify Me" (verses 12-15). God tells us that He can have anything; however, what He wants is our thanksgiving, our obedience, our faith in His deliverance, and our prayers.

Bread and Wine as Symbols of Joyful Communion

In addition to the many Mosaic types fulfilled in the Lord's Supper, Jewish members of the first-century ecclesia would have recognized bread and wine as symbols of joyful communion. Such members would have thought of passages like, "Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has already accepted your works" (Eccl. 9:7). They certainly would have reflected on the first time that Scripture mentions bread and wine together, when "Melchizedek, king of Salem, brought out bread and wine, (Gen 14:18). Melchizedek and Abram came together in joyful celebration of the miraculous deliverance over a superior military force, a public declaration that God provided the victory. Members of the early ecclesia would have reflected upon the fact that God was the source of these symbols of joyful communion, providing the "wine that makes glad the heart of man... and bread which strengthens man's heart" (Psa 104: 15).

Thanksgiving: Knowing Jesus in the Breaking of Bread

Luke's account of the Lord's Supper gives a prominent place to Christ giving thanks:

Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, "Take this and divide it among yourselves; for I say to you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes." And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me." Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you. (Luke 22:17-20)

Note that Luke records Jesus giving thanks three times: for the first Passover cup (v. 17), the bread (v. 19), and "likewise" the third Passover cup (v. 20 "the cup of blessing"). We have seen the rich associations that *eucharestia/eulogia*, and *towdah* had for disciples in the first century ecclesia. Luke takes these same themes and applies

them to Jesus' interaction with the two disciples on the road to Emmaus:

Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed [*eulogeo*] and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; and He vanished from their sight...So they rose up that very hour and returned to Jerusalem, and found the eleven and those who were with them gathered together...And they told about the things that had happened on the road, and how He was known to them in the breaking of bread. (Luke 24:30-35)

Luke depicts the deliberate echo of the Lord's Supper—giving thanks for the bread—as opening the eyes of the disciples. They saw Christ for who he was. They knew him in the Breaking of Bread. Approaching the Lord's Supper with thanksgiving, as Christ did, enables us to truly see him in the bread and wine, to know his sacrifice on a deeper level through fellowship, and to appreciate the overflowing joy he took in the community delivered by his offering. Paul discusses his aspirations for knowing Christ in this way: "...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship [*koinonia*] of His sufferings" (Phil 3:10).

Celebrating the Lord's Supper with Thanksgiving

We have seen the many reasons for celebrating the Lord's Supper with thanksgiving. Christ's powerful example, focusing on giving thanks as a key and repeated part of the Lord's Supper, challenges us to imitate him. The first-century ecclesias recognized this and referred to the ceremony as "thanksgiving". God's expectation for us to be thankful is good for us, both individually and as a community. To act with thanksgiving is to acknowledge God's grace in our lives, to accept His many gifts with joy. To celebrate the Lord's Supper with thanksgiving is to recognize everything that God has done, is doing, and will do for us, to see His gifts in His Son (represented by the Bread and Wine) and in our brothers and sisters, and to receive these gifts with joy, praising Him. The elements of the thanksgiving offering—peace, fellowship, sacrifice, deliverance, and prayer—are fully realized in the Lord's Supper. To come to the Lord's Table with thanksgiving

enables our eyes to be opened and truly see Christ in the Bread and the Wine.

God and Jesus established the Lord's Supper as a time for us to express our joyful thanksgiving, both individually and as a collective. Our community's celebration of the Breaking of Bread can be described in many ways. In my experience, without exception, we are reverent and thankful. However, I think that visitors to our Lord's Supper might struggle to detect our joy at the Lord's Table. Since we try to follow the practices of the first-century ecclesia, let's remember to emulate their joy:

Day after day they met by common consent in the Temple; they broke bread together in their homes, sharing meals with simple joy. They praised God continually and all the people respected them. Every day the Lord added to their number those who were finding salvation. (Acts 2:46-47 Phillips)

In both the first century and the twenty-first century, our joy strengthens us and draws people to God.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

Remembering

“Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me... This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.”

(1 Cor 11:24-25)

Christ identifies remembering as the reason we gather together to partake of the Bread and Cup. “In remembrance” is a phrase so familiar that we use it reflexively to describe our partaking. Christ noted that familiarity leads people to not appreciate things as they should (Luke 4:24). Our familiarity should not prevent us from being appropriately self-reflective and asking, “What does it mean to eat the Bread and drink the Cup ‘in remembrance’ of him?”

When they began to observe the Lord’s Supper, Christ’s disciples would have had concrete, first-hand memories of Christ, both during his life and after his resurrection. These remembrances were powerful and John grounds his testimony on them:

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us. (1 John 1:1-2)

Although we are not eyewitnesses like John, Christ is tangible through our faith. Christ values our remembrances of him even more than those who were blessed to have physically seen, heard, and touched him: “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed”

(John 20:29).

Spiritually speaking, we are witnesses to all that Christ has done for us and is doing for us. We remember Christ's past work and his ongoing work. In faith, we know that Christ is with us both individually and as a community. We recognize that Christ is absent, yet he is always with us (Matt 28:20). As the Head, Christ is present in his body, connecting all the parts (Col 2:19; 1 Cor 12:12-27). Christ is present with us, walking amongst the ecclesias who make up his body (Rev 1:13; Rev 2:1). One writer⁶² eloquently captures the paradox of remembering Christ, who is both absent and with us:

During the sacred moments of the breaking of bread we have his assurance that, though we cannot see him, he is with us. Sometimes we meet him there, and we know we have met him. With the passing years we should grow ever more conscious of his nearness: not only in moments of remembrance, in times of great sorrow or temptation, but through all the experiences of our life.

Bread and Wine as Objects of Remembrance

It is part of the human condition to need objects to help us remember. We are very familiar with historical objects of remembrance. Some ancient ones, like the Pyramids, are still with us. Some places—such as Washington, DC—are testaments to objects of remembrance (e.g., the Lincoln Memorial, the Washington Monument, the Jefferson Memorial, etc.). Usually, objects of remembrance are exclusively visual. For example, in celebration of “Remembrance Day”, Canadians wear a pin (red paper, to symbolize a poppy) in their lapels to honor those killed in wars.

God recognized our need for memorial objects. The Old Law was replete with objects of remembrance. One writer⁶³ notes that the Mosaic Law had “daily, weekly and monthly remembrances.” The New Law has the Bread and the Cup as the Divinely ordained objects of remembrance. These two objects engage all of our senses: sight,

⁶² Melva Purkis, *A Life of Jesus* (Birmingham: CMPA, 1953/Electronic edition: 2013)

⁶³ F. E. Mitchell, *Offerings, Feasts, and Sanctuary* (Birmingham: CMPA, 1990/Electronic edition 2016)

touch, taste, sound, and smell. This is in some respects a continuation of the practice of some memorials in the Mosaic Law, which used the senses as anchors to memorialization. Some examples are:

Taste	<i>Passover</i> : tasting the “bitter herbs” as a memorial of suffering
Touch	<i>Burnt Offering</i> : touching the head of a sacrificial offering
Smell	<i>Altar of Incense</i> : smelling the offering
Sound	<i>Feast of Trumpets</i> : hearing the trumpet
Sight	<i>Tassels on the border</i> : seeing the blue thread

All of our senses are engaged in the remembrance that Christ commands. We see the Bread and the Cup. Because we “take” the Bread and Cup, our sense of touch is engaged. We taste the Bread and Wine. We smell the Bread and Wine. In terms of sound, Christ uses the Greek word *trogo* four times to describe our eating at his table (John 6:54, 56, 57, 58); this word describes the sound of eating (e.g., Vine: “to gnaw, to chew”)⁶⁴. We have been given a ritual that enables us to remember in a deep and powerful way, using all of our senses.

Research on the human brain demonstrates the Divine wisdom in the choice of bread and wine as our objects of remembrance. The human brain is designed to process food and drink as uniquely powerful objects of remembrance. The reason for this is because the area of the brain that processes episodic memories is interrelated with the area that integrates information from the five senses. Like all kinds of memories, food memories also tend to be strongly associated with emotion. Food memories are also highly connected to relationships and social bonds. The emotional effect of food is embedded in memory and strongly related to social ties and group identity.

The Scriptural Foundations of Remembrance

⁶⁴ W.E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Iowa Falls: World Bible, 1981)

When the disciples heard Christ say, “Do this in remembrance of me”, what Biblical associations would they have made? There are two words—one Hebrew and one Greek—which would have been foundational to the disciples’ understanding of “remembrance” in the context of the Lord’s Supper. The Greek word *anamnesis* is translated as “remembrance” in the accounts of the Lord’s Supper (Luke 22:19 and 1 Cor 11:24-25). The word only occurs four times total in the New Testament and just once outside the accounts of the Lord’s Supper. The other occurrence in the New Testament is in Hebrews 10, where it is used to show the inferiority of the Mosaic sacrifices and to introduce the superiority of Christ’s sacrifice: “But the blood of bulls and goats cannot take away sins. It only reminds [*anamnesis*] people of their sins from one year to the next” (Heb 10:3-4 CEV). Although it is appropriate, in the context of self-examination, to remember our own sins at the Lord’s Supper, this passage in Hebrews shows us that mere remembrance of our transgressions is not enough. To focus exclusively on our sins and not on our salvation is a destructive practice that is not in keeping with Scripture.

Two (of the four total) uses of *anamnesis* in the Septuagint demonstrate that the remembrance of our sins is necessary but not sufficient. The titles of Psalms 38 and 70 are “To Bring to Remembrance”. In both Psalms, the speaker acknowledges his sin in a deep and emotionally charged manner. However, the remembrance isn’t about the sin; it is about God responding to prayer by “remembering” the sinner by providing salvation and deliverance. The language of the Psalms evokes the grain offering as a “memorial”, a rite that employed frankincense to create a sweet smell to God. One writer⁶⁵ notes:

...the lesson is that when in trouble one shows faith and trust in God by crying to Him for deliverance. That prayer, as a sweet savour, rises as a memorial before God and God remembers the plight of His servant. In scriptural language when God remembers, then He acts... Thus David’s prayer was a cry to God to remember him and deliver him.

Another of the Septuagint’s use of *anamnesis* highlights the sense of

⁶⁵ Dudley Fifiield, *The Praises of Israel Volume One - Psalms 1–72* (Birmingham: CMPA, 2008/Electronic edition 2013)

smell; the showbread reference in Leviticus 24:7 (i.e., “bread of remembrance”) is in the context of smell prompted by the incense: “And you shall put pure frankincense on each row, that it may be on the bread for a memorial”. The final occurrence of anamnesis is in Numbers 10, where we see how all-encompassing the idea of “remembrance” was in the Mosaic Law. “Also in the day of your gladness, in your appointed feasts, and at the beginning of your months, you shall blow the trumpets over your burnt offerings and over the sacrifices of your peace offerings; and they shall be a memorial for you before your God: I am the Lord your God” (Num 10:10).

The Hebrew equivalent of *anamnesis* is *zikkaron*. The King James Version translates *zikkaron* as “memorial” seventeen times and “remembrance” six times. The Hebrew word is used to describe many important events and objects as being a “remembrance” or a “memorial”. In Jesus’ day, *anamnesis* and *zikkaron* were powerfully connected to each other:

Though Jews today may think of these words just as wistful glances back in time, the rabbis saw *zikarone* [remembrance] as *anamnesis*: making the past present. It helps to think of remembrance as a “pointer” through time, connecting the present to the past ... Imagine, then, that all things that ever happened coexist at different points in space⁶⁶.

In Exodus 12:14, God gives a command, similar to 1 Corinthians 11:24-25, when the Passover is instituted: “This day shall be a memorial [*zikkaron*] to you.” When Jesus told the Twelve that partaking of the Bread was in “remembrance”, the apostles’ minds would have immediately gone to the many times that the Mosaic Law identified bread/grain as a “remembrance” or “memorial”. The Feast of Unleavened Bread was a memorial, whose purpose was the explicit teaching of the memorial’s meaning (Exod 13:6-9).

Azkarah is a cognate of *zikkaron* and describes each of the various breads/grain offerings of the Mosaic Law as a “memorial”. The grain offering was a memorial that created a sweet smell (Lev 2:2, 9, 16)

⁶⁶ Lawrence A. Hoffman, “Jewish and Christian Liturgy,” in Tikva Frymer-Kensky, David Novak, Michael A. Signer, David Fox Sandmel, and Peter Ochs, eds., *Christianity in Jewish Terms* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2000)

and could be eaten by the priests (Lev 6:15). The word was also used to describe the grain offering that was a part of the sin offering (Lev 5:12) and the showbread as a memorial (Lev 24:7).

The Mosaic Law provided many other multi-sensory tokens of remembrance. Likewise, the Feast of Trumpets was called a memorial (Lev 23:24). As mentioned earlier, the sounding of the trumpets for the feasts, burnt offerings, and peace offerings was a memorial (Num 10:10). In Joshua 4, twelve stones were removed from the Jordan to be a memorial for the miraculous crossing of the river: “And these stones shall be for a memorial [*zikkaron*] to the children of Israel forever” (Josh 4:7).

The Twelve disciples would have also understood that *zikkaron* was associated with the family of God, as represented by the twelve tribes. As a memorial, two onyx stones were placed in the ephod (Exod 28:12, 29), one on each shoulder, to represent six of the twelve tribes respectively. This is yet another example of how the family of God—as symbolized by the number twelve—is connected to the meal of remembrance, to the Lord’s Supper:

- The twelve loaves of the showbread
- The twelve stones from the Jordan
- The twelve baskets full of leftovers from the feeding of the five thousand

Christ built on this connection when he told the Twelve, “...you may eat and drink at My table in My kingdom, and sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Luke 22:30). The repetition of this symbol reinforces our understanding that the Lord’s Supper is a celebration of community as expressed through God’s family. This symbol is manifest in the Old Testament’s final use of *zikkaron*, through the image of the “book of remembrance”. In Malachi 3:16, we read: “Then those who feared the Lord spoke to one another, and the Lord listened and heard them; so a book of remembrance [*zikkaron*] was written before Him For those who fear the Lord and who meditate on His name.”

Passover—the feast that Christ was celebrating with his disciples—was all about “remembrance” (*zikkaron*). In Exodus 12, we read:

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It is the Lord’s Passover. For I will pass through the land of Egypt on that night, and will strike all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both man and beast; and against all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgment: I am the Lord. Now the blood shall be a sign for you on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you; and the plague shall not be on you to destroy you when I strike the land of Egypt. So this day shall be to you a memorial [zikkaron]; and you shall keep it as a feast to the Lord throughout your generations. You shall keep it as a feast by an everlasting ordinance... (v 11-14)

The remembrance of Passover is so foundational to understanding the relationship between God and His people that the language used to describe it is identical to the language used to describe the people’s fundamental duty to God:

Passover Duty to Remember	Ongoing Duty to Remember
“And you shall tell your son in that day, saying, ‘This is done because of what the Lord did for me when I came up from Egypt.’ It shall be as a <u>sign to you on your hand</u> and as a <i>memorial [zikkaron] between your eyes</i> that the Lord’s law may be in your mouth; for with a strong hand the Lord has brought you out of Egypt” (Exod 13: 8-9).	“And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a <u>sign on your hand</u> , and they shall be as <i>frontlets between your eyes</i> ” (Deut 6:6-8).

The parallels are striking. The foundation of our relationship with God and His Son is to remember that the Gospel has delivered us from slavery to sin and saved us: “Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin. And a slave does not abide in the house forever, but a son abides forever. Therefore if the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed” (John 8:34-36).

A Memorial Name

When the disciples heard Christ say, “This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me” (1 Cor 11:25), they also would have thought of

how “remembrance” was connected to God’s name. One writer⁶⁷ notes”

In the Old Testament the almost universal association of remembrance is with Jehovah —His mighty acts, His covenants, His longsuffering. His very Name is a memorial Name, a constant reminder of His progressive, unfailing, gracious Purpose. The number of times the words “remember”, “memorial” and the Covenant Name occur in the same context is positively startling.

The word *zēker* (a cognate of *zikkaron*) is used to describe God’s name, especially as it relates to a covenant: “And God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM’...This is My name forever, and this is My memorial [*zēker*] to all generations” (Exod 3:14-15). God’s name is His memorial:

- “Thy name, O Lord, endureth forever; and thy memorial [*zēker*], O Lord, throughout all generations” (Psa 135:13 KJV).
- “The Lord, the God of hosts, the Lord is his memorial [*zēker*] name” (Hos 12:5 ESV).

It has been pointed out⁶⁸ that the memorial name embodies the ultimate fulfillment of the covenant promises: “‘He who will be,’ is the memorial name the Deity chooses to be known by among His people. It reminds them that HE will be manifested in a multitude...” The prospective gift of eternal life, by becoming partakers of the Divine nature, is an inherent and essential component of the memorial name.

Therefore, the disciples would have expected Christ to connect the covenant cup to remembrance: “This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me” (1 Cor 11:25). Biblically, to act in relation to the covenant is “to remember.” Throughout Scripture, God’s actions regarding His covenant are called “remembering” [*zakar*]. The covenant with Noah is an excellent example. God tells Noah, “I will remember My covenant which is between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh; the waters shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh” (Gen 9:15). Throughout the redemption story of Israel out of Egypt, God repeatedly

⁶⁷ H.A. Whittaker, *Studies in the Gospels* (Cannock: Biblia, n.d.)

⁶⁸ John Thomas, *Eureka: an Exposition of the Apocalypse* (n.p., n.pub., n.d.)

states that He is acting because He is remembering His covenant (Exod 2:24; Exod 6:5; Lev 26:42, 45). God is constant in His actions to fulfill the covenant:

- “He remembers His covenant forever, the word which He commanded, for a thousand generations” (Psa 105:8).
- “He gives food to his faithful followers; he always remembers his covenant” (Psa 11:5 NET).

Although God is constant in His remembering, human beings are not. And because God remembers us, He helps us to remember Him, His covenants, and His Son: “For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust” (Psa 103:14).

There were all of these associations with “remembrances” in the Mosaic Law to support the disciples’ understanding of Christ’s command to do this “in remembrance of me”. Yet the Twelve struggled to obey Christ’s command. In his ministry and in his current role at the right hand of God, Christ commands his disciples to remember him. For example, Christ commanded the Twelve to remember the miraculous feedings of the multitudes (Matt 16:9; Mark 8:18). Christ identified the “leaven of the Pharisees” as an obstacle to remembering. This obstacle is removed when we stop and remember all the evidence that demonstrates that God has worked powerfully in our lives: “Do you not yet perceive nor understand? Is your heart still hardened? Having eyes, do you not see? And having ears, do you not hear? And do you not remember?” (Mark 8:17-18)

Remembering enables us to repent. Christ chastens two of the ecclesias in Revelation by commanding them to remember. To the ecclesia in Ephesus, he says: “Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place—unless you repent” (Rev 2:4-5). Christ commands the Ephesians to remember their first love [*protos*], a phrase that is powerfully evocative. It suggests the intense devotion of the newly married. Also, because *protos* means “most important” as well as “chronologically first”, it means that the Ephesians have forgotten the most important love.

To the ecclesia in Sardis, Christ says, “Remember therefore how you

have received and heard; hold fast and repent" (Rev 3:3). The word translated "received" is a common one, with the sense of "taking up"; it is the same word used to describe Jesus taking up the Bread and the Cup. Christ is exhorting those in Sardis to remember what they have "taken up" (i.e., their commitment to following Christ), to "hold on", and to repent. Christ's exhortation to Ephesus and Sardis is helpful for us as we partake in the Lord's Supper. Taking up the Bread and the Cup enables us to consider our first and most important love, to hold fast, and to repent.

What Do We Remember?

Scripture shows us that Christ's commandment to "do this in remembrance of me" has many meanings for us. We remember God's love expressed through His covenant promises and embodied in His name. We remember the bitterness of Christ's sacrifice, the love that motivated it, and the joy of his victory over sin, a victory that has set us free from slavery to sin. We remember that we are connected to each other as members of God's family. We remember that we are repentant sinners who have been redeemed and made one in Christ. We remember that Christ is with us now and is constantly engaged in helping us to be more like him.

When Jesus said to partake of the Bread and the Cup "in remembrance of me", the disciples naturally would have thought about the many meals that they shared with him. These memories would have been especially powerful because they were connected to the senses engaged in food and drink, as well as the profound relationship that they had with the Master. Many of us have had a similar experience of eating a special meal and having a deep remembrance of a friend or family member who is no longer with us.

After Christ was crucified and raised, the disciples' celebration of the Lord's Supper would have brought a flood of memories about him. The miraculous feedings of the multitudes, the provision of wine at Cana, the woman washing his feet with her tears, Mary's anointing, and the Passover feasts would have been powerful remembrances. They would have remembered the many criticisms that their Master faced for daring to eat with "tax collectors and sinners" and how he rebuked

those criticisms. The disciples would have especially remembered the events of the last Passover: Christ's joy at eating with them before he suffered, his washing of their feet, his gentle chastisement when they argued amongst each other as to who the greatest was. They would have remembered Christ's promise that they would share this meal again in the kingdom.

Although we don't have the first-hand experience with Christ like the Twelve did, we can remember the times when we felt especially close to the Master at his table. These remembrances will naturally be highly individualized, but I will share two of mine by way of illustration.

First, I recall a time when the presider's reading aloud of "This is my body" prompted me to look around at the other members of my ecclesia and to see them in a new way. I saw them in a way that recognized and accepted that everyone had challenges, everyone struggled, and that Christ had formed us as a body to support each other. I remember thinking that this was the first time that I began to really understand Christ's comment, made when seated at the table with Matthew: "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance" (Luke 5:31-21).

Second, I recall a time when I was newly baptized. It was the social time in between Sunday School and the Memorial Service, and I was speaking with a group of my peers. In a genuine way, one of my friends questioned why God and Christ would "go to all that trouble for us." An older Brother, much respected but with a well-deserved reputation for "crustiness", was passing by and responded, "Because God and Jesus love us that much." We all turned and saw that the Brother had tears in his eyes. He spoke again, "Because they love us that much." This profound statement stopped us in our tracks, and the Brother continued on his way. Although that happened forty years ago and that Brother has been asleep in Christ for many years, "Because they love us that much" has helped me draw close to Christ in my remembrances of him. This interaction helped me begin to understand that Jesus built his table on love: "Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that His hour had come that He should depart from this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end" (John 13:1).

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Take, Thank, Break, Give

“And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’”

(Luke 22:19)

The Lord's Supper is a time of action. Specifically, four actions are highlighted:

- To take
- To thank
- To break
- To give

The order of these actions is significant. Each one provides participants at the Lord's Supper with a deeper understanding of the Divine purpose as expressed in the Bread and Cup.

To Take

The Greek word translated as “took” is *lambanó*, which paradoxically means both “to take” and “to receive.” The King James Version renders the word as “receive” 133 times and as “take” 106 times. It is important to note that the idea of “taking” precedes the other actions. The primacy of this action draws our attention to the essential act of Christ taking on the challenges of sinful flesh. In Matthew 8:17, the writer quotes Isaiah 53:4 to assert that Christ has taken our infirmities.

The writer to the Hebrews expands on this fundamental concept:

Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. (Heb 2:14-15)

To accomplish his mission, Christ took on the form of a servant (Phil 2:7). The result of Christ's action is metaphorically described as taking salvation: "I will take up the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord" (Psa 116:13).

By taking on our infirmities and our fleshly servitude, Christ was able to take the cup of salvation. As a result, we have received awesome gifts. Scripture uses *lambanó* to describe these gifts:

- "And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received [*lambanó*] the reconciliation" (Rom 5:11).
- "For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received [*lambanó*] the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, 'Abba, Father'" (Rom 8:15).
- "And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive [*lambanó*] the promise of the eternal inheritance" (Heb 9:15).

Christ's taking results in us receiving incalculable blessings. Through him, we have a right relationship with God. Through him, we join God's family. Through him, we have the promise of an eternal inheritance. For all these things, we give thanks.

To Thank

Christ's powerful example, focusing on giving thanks as a key and repeated part of the Lord's Supper, challenges us to imitate him. The first-century ecclesias recognized this and referred to the ceremony as "thanksgiving". God's expectation for us to be thankful is good for us, both individually and as a community. To act with thanksgiving is to

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acknowledge God's grace in our lives and to accept His many gifts with joy. To celebrate the Lord's Supper with thanksgiving is to recognize everything that God has done, is doing, and will do for us, to see His gifts in His Son (represented by the Bread and Wine) and in our brothers and sisters, and to receive these gifts with joy, praising Him. The elements of the thanksgiving offering—peace, fellowship, sacrifice, deliverance, prayer—are fully realized in the Lord's Supper. To come to the Lord's Table with thanksgiving enables our eyes to be opened and truly see Christ in the Bread and the Wine.

To Break

The Greek word *klao* is used to describe Christ's action in breaking bread, both in his institution of the Lord's Supper and in other meals (e.g., feeding the five thousand). The word has the sense of "breaking into pieces." It has the same metaphorical uses in Greek as it does in English, carrying the idea of sadness (e.g., a broken heart). A related word (*klaió*) means "to cry" (e.g., Peter in Luke 22:62). Christ's purpose was to heal the brokenhearted:

The Spirit of the Lord God is upon Me,
Because the Lord has anointed Me
To preach good tidings to the poor;
He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives,
And the opening of the prison to those who are bound;
To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord,
And the day of vengeance of our God;
To comfort all who mourn, To console those who mourn in Zion,
To give them beauty for ashes,
The oil of joy for mourning,
The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;
That they may be called trees of righteousness,
The planting of the Lord, that He may be glorified. (Isa 61:1-3)

But Christ can only heal us if we acknowledge our brokenness and our need.

This acknowledgment is a sacrifice of our egos and our pride: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart, O

God, you will not despise" (Psa 51:17).

Paul provides a great example of how our individual brokenness is healed in Christ. Paul had an ongoing struggle with a "thorn in the flesh" that caused him to despair. Christ helped Paul understand that the thorn in the flesh was an opportunity to glorify Christ:

But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong. (2 Cor 12:9-10)

Our weakness, our brokenness, is healed and made strong through our reliance on Christ. Indeed, Christ uses our individual flaws to let his light shine through us. As one poet noted, "Ring the bells that still can ring/Forget your perfect offering/There is a crack, a crack in everything/that's how the light gets in."⁶⁹

Our brokenness is both individual and collective. In establishing the Lord's Supper, Christ specifically identifies his community, symbolized by his body, as broken: "And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body'" (Luke 22:19). As a community of faith, we must acknowledge our shared brokenness. Paul makes this clear: "The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread" (1 Cor 10:16-17). "Participation" is *kononia*, and the foundation of our fellowship is the shared understanding that everyone seated at the Lord's Table is a sinner redeemed through Christ. One writer sums up this idea with beautiful simplicity: "Community is the fruit born through shared brokenness."⁷⁰

The symbols of the Lord's Supper represent brokenness. Both the Bread and Wine are products of individual brokenness becoming collective brokenness. In both cases, raw materials are taken from many different individual sources. It takes roughly six hundred to eight hundred individual grapes to make a bottle of wine. About three

⁶⁹ Leonard Cohen, "Anthem" (*The Future*, 1992)

⁷⁰ Henri Nouwen, *The Life of the Beloved* (New York: Crossroad, 1996)

hundred and fifty individual stalks of wheat are needed to make one loaf of bread. In both cases, the individual elements are crushed and broken and the individual components must be combined to create a useful product. The Bread and Wine reinforce the teaching that there are many parts to Christ's body and that it is only by bringing the parts together that we have the elements needed to grow and build up the body.

To Give

Brokenness precedes giving. Being broken is a prerequisite for being distributed. In fact, a cognate word for "broken" (*kléros*, from *klao*) is used to describe those who are given an inheritance. Paul uses two variations of the word to describe our inheritance in Romans 8:17: "and if children, then heirs—heirs [*kléronomos*] of God and joint heirs [*sugkléronomos*] with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together."

When we suffer trials as part of Christ's body, we associate ourselves with his brokenness. As a result, Christ distributes gifts to us. In Ephesians 4, Paul outlines our gifts. Paul contextualizes our gifts as coming from Christ's gifts: "But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift" (Eph 4:7). He goes to enumerate our gifts and provides the purpose for our gifts:

...speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. (Eph 4:15-16)

The purpose is clear—to work together so that the body of Christ can grow to be more connected to the Head.

By giving of ourselves, we follow Christ's example. He focused on the power of giving right from the beginning of the Lord's Supper. Christ washed the disciples' feet to dramatically reinforce that he expects his followers to give: "For I have given you an example that you should do as I have done to you" (John 13:14). Christ expects us to give abundantly, just as we have been given: "Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over

will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you" (Luke 6:38).

We can give many different things. We are all gifted in different ways, as Paul asserts in several of his letters. We tend to think of gifts as talents, and certainly there is strong Biblical evidence for this line of reasoning. However, our experiences are gifts as well. While we often feel joy at using our talents in God's service, our most valuable experiences are frequently painful (Heb 12:11). Just as Christ learned obedience through his painful experiences (Heb 5:8), our experiences can be a source of strength for us and for others.

To share our painful experiences is to create a community of shared faith. I will always remember an incident that demonstrated the tremendous power of shared brokenness. I was teaching at a Bible School, and my topic was the "healing ministry of Jesus". One day's lessons were exclusively devoted to healing children. I cannot conceive of a more painful trial than the death of a child, and in the class there were two families whose children died in especially tragic ways. I remember saying a quick prayer that I would address the challenging topic in a sensitive and honest way.

After the class concluded, both families came up to me. We talked about Jairus' daughter and the other events covered in the class. Then they turned to each other and started talking about the deaths of their children. They gave each other the gift of compassion and consolation; this was a gift that only someone who had experienced such a horrific trial could give. Just as Christ was, we are taken and broken so that we might be given. And in this, we give thanks.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

Eating Flesh and Drinking Blood

“He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.”

(John 6:56)

In the synagogue in Capernaum, Christ made several statements that baffled his original audience and continue to be misunderstood to this present day. The original audience called Christ's statements about eating his flesh and drinking his blood “hard” sayings (John 6:60). Many in the Greco-Roman world misinterpreted these hard sayings and accused the early ecclesia of cannibalism. Some self-professed Christians continued to grapple with these hard sayings over the centuries, resulting in the development of an incorrect belief that the bread and wine are changed (or “transubstantiated”) into the literal body and blood of Christ.

We understand, with the benefit of hindsight resulting from Christ's teaching about his body and blood on the night he was betrayed, that ingesting the flesh and blood was a metaphorical rather than a literal statement. However, these commands were “hard” for his original audience to understand, and they remain challenging for all of Christ's disciples to act upon. In this chapter, we will explore the purpose of Christ's words for both the immediate audience in Capernaum's synagogue and for the generations of believers who remember him by partaking of his body and blood.

Christ's Statements Regarding “Eating Flesh” and “Drinking Blood”: the Context

In less than twenty-four hours, Christ went from having a multitude of followers who thought he was the Messiah and wanted to make him a king (John 6:14-15), to having few followers, with even his disciples “murmuring” against him (John 6:61). It seems that Christ was being intentionally provocative in his teaching, escalating from the well-received statement that he was providing the people with bread to the badly-received statement that followers had to eat his flesh and drink his blood (John 6:60).

Picture yourself in the synagogue in Capernaum during the events recorded in John 6:

It is very crowded because many people have followed Christ here as a result of the miraculous feast that he provided the day before on the other side of Galilee. As a member of the synagogue, you know Christ well because he resides in Capernaum when he isn't on the road teaching (Matt 4:16). You know of and have witnessed Christ's astonishing teaching and miraculous healings (Mark 1:21-34). There is so much evidence that Christ is a prophet sent from God that you have no excuse to not believe in him (Matt 11:20-24).

Despite your first-hand knowledge of Christ and belief in him, he makes a series of statements that stop you in your tracks because they are so “hard”. You are not one of the recent followers of Christ who complained about his self-declared heavenly origins (John 6:41-42) because you remember the public proclamation that Jesus of Nazareth was the “Holy One of God” (Mark 1:24). However, Christ makes an additional statement that confuses you. Although you have no idea what he's talking about when he says, “The bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world” (John 6:51), you begin to argue with others in the audience who are openly complaining. “Give him a chance to explain,” you say to the doubters. You know that Jesus doesn't teach like other teachers (Mark 1:22) and you are waiting for him to explain. But Jesus' next words don't clarify things for you; rather, they make you even more confused. Jesus assertively states the following:

- *“...unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.”*
- *“Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life,*

and I will raise him up at the last day.”

- *“For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed.”*
- *“He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him.”*
- *“As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me.”*

These statements go against everything that you have been taught and believe. You know that Jesus teaches with stories and analogies, sometimes using exaggeration to make his point. You remember the hyperbolic “beam in the eye”; however, cannibalism isn’t hyperbole; it just makes no sense whatsoever. You see the crowd begin to leave; you see the doubt in his closest disciples’ eyes; and you ask yourself if you, too, will stop believing that Jesus was sent from God.

What was Christ’s purpose for his immediate audience in speaking those “hard” things? What is the Divine purpose and meaning for us who understand how the “hard” sayings are embodied in the Lord’s Supper?

Transformational Faith: Christ’s Purpose for His Audience in Capernaum

It seems that no one in that audience in Capernaum understood the “hard” sayings of Christ: “The deep meaning that lay behind those words was not revealed until he spoke to the Twelve alone in the upper room; it could not be understood in its fullness until he rose again from the dead.”⁷¹ To understand Christ’s purpose for his audience, it is essential to understand how his conversation in the synagogue at Capernaum evolved. We will see that Christ deliberately moved his followers from a place where their faith was conditional, based on the receipt of immediate blessings, to a new place of unconditional faith. As we will see, Christ’s words about “eating flesh and drinking blood” were intended to move his followers from a transactional faith to a transformational faith.

⁷¹ Melva Purkis, *A Life of Jesus* (Birmingham: CMPA, 1953/Electronic edition: 2013)

Jesus exposes the crowd's motivation when he says, "...you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled" (John 6:26-27). Leaders in the crowd responded with a question that, on the surface, appeared to accept Christ's rebuke: "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" (John 6:28). The gap between their real intent and the words they expressed is just like the expert in the law: "And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, 'Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?'" (Luke 10: 25). Like the lawyer, the crowd was essentially using the interaction with Christ for their own reasons, to satisfy their own wants.

Christ's response didn't give the crowd what they were looking for, so they persisted by using a clumsy attempt to engage him in a *quid pro quo*. The day before, the crowd was willing to acknowledge that Christ was the prophet like unto Moses (John 6:14). "Now," they said to Christ, "give us bread and in turn we will proclaim that you are 'that prophet'." The crowd's invitation to Christ was a repetition of his temptations in the wilderness: the provision of bread for purposes other than God's glory, the miraculous public demonstration that would bring all eyes to Christ, and the opportunity to be worshiped by the crowd by exalting self rather than God. As he did in the wilderness, Christ responds to the temptation by taking the focus away from himself and onto God: "Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven" (John 6:32).

The crowd's spokespeople continue their campaign of flattery: "Lord, give us this bread always" (John 6:34). At the start of the dialogue, the crowd called Christ "Rabbi" (John 6:25); now they called him "Lord". The crowd demanded the bread "always" (Greek: *pantote*). At his first trial, Christ demonstrated that he had indeed "always" provided this bread, "I spoke openly to the world. I always [*pantote*] taught in synagogues and in the temple, where the Jews always [*pantote*] meet" (John 18:20). Now, in his role as High Priest and Mediator, Christ is now "always" helping those who come to God through him: "Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always [*pantote*] lives to make intercession for them" (Heb 7:25).

When it became clear to the crowd that they were not getting a "free

lunch”, they dropped all pretense to curry favor with Christ. To the crowd, Christ is no longer “Lord”, or even “Rabbi”; instead, he is “the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know” (John 6:42). The crowd “murmurs” (KJV), the same word used to describe the people of Israel who rebelled against Moses (1 Cor 10:10). The crowd thought that it was going to be re-enacting the daily provision of bread; instead, they re-enacted the people’s rejection of God’s purpose for them.

Christ addresses the crowd with language that challenges their faith. Not only must you eat my flesh, Christ says, but you must also drink my blood. The audience would have recoiled at this statement because the prohibition against such an action went back to God’s command to Noah, “But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood” (Gen 9:4). This proscription was enshrined in the Mosaic Law:

- “Moreover you shall not eat any blood in any of your dwellings, whether of bird or beast. Whoever eats any blood, that person shall be cut off from his people” (Lev 9:26-27).
- “Only be sure that you do not eat the blood, for the blood is the life; you may not eat the life with the meat. You shall not eat it; you shall pour it on the earth like water. You shall not eat it, that it may go well with you and your children after you, when you do what is right in the sight of the Lord” (Deut 12:23-25).

Moreover, drinking blood was associated with pagan worship and therefore abhorrent to Christ’s audience: “Their sorrows shall be multiplied who hasten after another god; their drink offerings of blood I will not offer, nor take up their names on my lips” (Psa 16: 4).

Joseph and Christ: Hard (Skleros) Sayings

The use of the word *skleros* (“hard” in verse 60) reveals Jesus’ purpose. Although *skleros* is not used frequently in the New Testament, it does occur in an important event in the Septuagint—Joseph’s first interaction with his brothers after they had sold him into slavery: “Joseph saw his brothers and recognized them, but he acted as a stranger to them and spoke roughly [*skleros*] to them...Then they went to Jacob their father in the land of Canaan and told him all that had happened to them, saying: ‘The man who is lord of the land spoke roughly [*skleros*] to us, and took us for spies of the country..’” (Gen

42:7, 29-30).

As Joseph is acknowledged to be a powerful type of Christ, let's explore the parallels between Joseph's use of "hard" language with his brothers and Christ's use of "hard" language in the synagogue at Capernaum:

Joseph	Christ
The family of Israel sought to be fed by Joseph (Gen 42:7).	The multitude sought to be fed by Christ (John 6:26-27).
Joseph could have just provided food; however, he engaged his brothers in a dialogue that included a "hard" saying.	Christ could have just provided food; however, he engaged the crowd in a dialogue that included a "hard" saying.
Joseph's "hard" saying caused discord amongst the brothers (Gen 42:21-22).	Christ's "hard" saying caused discord amongst the crowd (John 6:52).
Joseph knew what was in his brothers' hearts because they didn't know he spoke their language (Gen 42:23).	Christ knew what was in the disciples' hearts (John 6:61).
Joseph is emotionally moved (Gen 42:24).	Emotion is palpable in Christ's words, "Do you also want to go away?" (John 6:67).
Joseph's "hard" saying causes a separation. Simeon stays with Joseph but the others go away.	Christ's "hard" saying causes a separation. The Twelve stay with Christ but the crowds go away.
Israel sends the brothers back to Joseph because he is the only option (Gen 43:1-2).	Peter speaks for those who stay with Christ, identifying him as the only option, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life" (John 6:68).
Joseph's words demand a transformation. Judah goes from selling his brother into slavery (Gen 37:26-28) to saving his brother by becoming a slave in his place (Gen 44:34).	Christ's words demand a transformed faith. Peter's response on behalf of the Twelve is a statement of ongoing transformation: "...we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (John 6:69).

Christ made those hard sayings to challenge his followers to move from a transactional faith (i.e., "we will believe when you give us what we want") to a transformational faith (i.e., "we will believe even when

things don't make sense"). This transformational faith is always a work in progress because it is always challenging. Peter's declaration of belief was one step forward in the long process of his conversion (Luke 22:32), whose foundation was the understanding that Christ is the only option, the singular "name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Unlike the audience in Capernaum, we know what Christ meant by his hard sayings; however, just like the audience in Capernaum, we have the chance for transformation by believing even when the things in our lives don't make sense and when we acknowledge that there is always Divine purpose in our challenges despite our struggles to understand them.

The Twelve Connect the Hard Saying with the New Passover

Christ delivered his hard saying near Passover (John 6:4), and at Passover, when Christ said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you," the Twelve would have immediately thought of that tense time in the Capernaum synagogue. Intellectually, the Twelve started to understand the hard sayings of John 6. This understanding was confirmed when Christ stated, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood." This statement regarding the blood would have made the Twelve reflect that drinking "wine, the blood of the grapes", was one of the blessings given to Israel by God (Deut 32:14). They also would have connected Christ's statement to a prophecy about the Messiah: "He washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes" (Gen 49:11). The Twelve now grasped how they were to act upon Christ's declaration: "...unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him" (John 6:53-56). The hard sayings made sense now, thought the Twelve.

Despite their new comprehension of the Master's words, their hearts were not ready to accept them. They refused to accept that Christ would be separated from them, and they continued to deny that Christ would be publicly humiliated, killed, and resurrected. Christ had repeatedly told them that he "must go to Jerusalem, and suffer many

things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised the third day" (Matt 16:21); however, the disciples continued to say, "Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You!" (Matt 16:22). One author has noted that eating flesh and drinking blood "is an intellectual eating and drinking of the Spirit and life words, or teaching that came down from heaven, concerning Christ and his crucifixion."⁷² At this time, the Twelve believed that Jesus was the Christ; however, they refused to believe in his crucifixion. The lessons for us are clear. We can't choose the elements of the Gospel that we like and reject the elements that we don't like.

Flesh and Blood

Why are there two symbols of remembrance? The New Testament's usage of the phrase "flesh and blood" clearly indicates that the items function as a two-part representation of the human condition (e.g., Matt 16:17; 1 Cor 15:50; Gal 1:16).

There is one such usage that also has a strong implicit connection to the Lord's Supper: "Inasmuch then as the children have partaken [*koinoneo*] of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared [*metecho*] in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil" (Heb 2:14). We recognize *koinoneo* as "fellowship", an essential principle underlying the Lord's Supper. Moreover, *metecho* suggests eating and is used by Paul to describe the Lord's Supper:

- "For we, though many, are one bread and one body; for we all partake [*metecho*] of that one bread" (1 Cor 10:17).
- "You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake [*metecho*] of the Lord's Table and of the table of demons" (1 Cor 10:21).

We see a Divinely designed symmetry: Christ partook of "flesh and blood", and then humankind can become a part of Christ's body by consuming his "flesh and blood".

⁷² John Thomas, *Phanerosis* (n.p., n.pub., n.d.)

Why Are We Commanded to Remember by Eating and Drinking?

In John 6, Christ introduces the requirement to “eat” his flesh and “drink” his blood, a requirement that he institutionalized with the Bread and Cup. In *A Meal with Jesus*, Tim Chester asks, “Why bread and wine? Why didn’t Jesus say, ‘Say this in remembrance of me’? Why give us physical substances to eat and drink?”⁷³ Social scientists, who have researched the meaning of food across a diverse set of cultures, have established that food is far more than fuel for the body: Michael Pollan states that “food is not just fuel. Food is about family, food is about community, food is about identity.”⁷⁴ The aphorism, “You are what you eat”, isn’t just about the impact of our nutritional choices on our bodies; it also means that our individual and communal identities are defined by what we take into our bodies.

Christ commands us to metaphorically ingest his flesh and blood because he expects us to internalize the relevant aspects of his identity, namely his character. Paul clearly understands Christ’s expectations: “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal 2:20 HCSB). Paul also understands that Christ “in us” is a process of growth, development, and maturation similar to the development of a child: “My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed [*morphoo*] in you” (Gal 4:19). This “formation” is really a “transformation”, as Paul tells the ecclesia at Rome, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed [*metamorphoo*] by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God” (Rom 12:2). The path of transformation is about reflecting the character of Christ through an ongoing process: “All of us, then, reflect the glory of the Lord with uncovered faces; and that same glory, coming from the Lord, who is the Spirit, transforms [*metamorphoo*] us into his likeness in an ever greater degree of glory” (2 Cor 3:19 GNT). The self-examination that plays such a large part in celebrating the Lord’s Supper enables us to assess if we are internalizing Christ: “Test yourselves and find out if you really are true to your faith. If you pass the test, you will discover that Christ is living in you. But if Christ isn’t living in you, you have

⁷³ Tim Chester, *A Meal with Jesus* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011)

⁷⁴ Michael Pollan, *In Defense of Food: An Eater’s Manifesto* (New York :Penguin Press, 2008)

failed" (2 Cor 13:5 CEV).

Our identity is not only individual; it is also communal because Christ is in all members of God's family, breaking down ethnic/cultural/racial barriers to create a new communal identity: "...where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all" (Col 3:11). Whether individually or communally, our identity in Christ is developed by rejecting the mind of the flesh and embracing the mind of Christ: "And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness" (Rom 8:10-11).

The family of God is our communal identity. As such, our identity flows from our Father. Our home is our Father's house. Like the faithful patriarchs, we know that the world is not our home; rather, the Father's house is our true home: "For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland" (Heb 11:14). "Homeland" is *patris*, which literally translates as "Father's land". The Father enables us to have Christ "in us": "I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love: (Eph 3:14-17).

Food is always a part of our conception of home and family. The bread and wine—the flesh and the blood—are truly the "home cooking" for the family of God. The beautiful vision of the kingdom of God combines the images of food, family, and homecoming:

The Lord of Heaven's Armies will hold a banquet for all the nations on this mountain. At this banquet there will be plenty of meat and aged wine—tender meat and choicest wine. On this mountain he will swallow up the shroud that is over all the peoples, the woven covering that is over all the nations; he will swallow up death permanently. The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears from every face, and remove his people's disgrace from all the earth. Indeed, the Lord has announced it! At that time they will say, "Look, here is our God! We waited for him, and he delivered us. Here is the Lord! We waited for him. Let's rejoice and celebrate his deliverance!" (Isa 25:6-9 NET)

Impacts of Consuming Christ's "Flesh and Blood"

In natural terms, our decisions about eating and drinking impact us. On the most basic "life or death" level, if we choose not to eat or drink, then we will die. Christ bases his teaching at the synagogue in Capernaum on the premise that, just as consuming natural food gives life, consuming spiritual food produces abundant life: "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst" (John 6:33-35). Christ contrasts the temporary sustenance provided by natural food with the on-going and eternal sustenance provided by spiritual food.

Throughout his teaching, Christ demands that his disciples be transformed. Foundational to our transformation is changing our perspective about what is "real". He summarizes his teaching by saying, "My flesh is the true food, and my blood is the true drink" (John 6:55 CEV). The Gospel message is real food, satisfying, and life-giving: "Why waste your money on what really isn't food? Why work hard for something that doesn't satisfy? Listen carefully to me, and you will enjoy the very best foods. Pay close attention! Come to me and live" (Isa 55:2-3 CEV). Our transformed understanding of what is "real" determines our goals and how we use all the resources (e.g., time, energy, money, etc.) with which God has provided us.

Part of this transformed perspective has to do with how we view time. Christ demands that we move from valuing the present above the eternal to valuing the eternal above the present. When we partake of the "flesh and blood" of Jesus, we acknowledge that we are living our lives according to God's time, not our time. Paul understood how this change in perspective is part of our ongoing transformation: "Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day... we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor 4:16-18). Christ tells all of his disciples that we move from focusing on the things that are temporary to the things that are eternal by "dwelling" [*meno*] in him (verse 56, KJV) through the flesh and blood. The Greek word *meno* refers to remaining in either place or state or time; hence, "He who feeds on My flesh and drinks

My blood dwells continually [*meno*] in Me" (John 6:56 AMPC).

Remaining in Christ is his key teaching regarding his command to eat his flesh and drink his blood. This was true for the original hearers of Christ's command to eat his flesh and drink his blood, and it is true for us, as well. The original hearers of this hard saying could not have understood Christ's meaning. However, Peter's faithful example shows the hard saying's proper response: "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (John 6:68-69).

Similarly, we come to the Lord's Supper sometimes struggling to understand what is happening in our lives, to see God's purpose in events, and to find meaning in our challenges. In these hard times, Christ exhorts us to hang on and to abide in him. Moreover, we, who can see the embodiment of Christ's words in the Bread and Wine, celebrate the Lord's Supper as an affirmation of our home and identity in Christ. Like Peter, we say, "To whom shall we go?" Our home, our family, our identity (both individually and collectively) are all in Christ.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Showing the Lord's Death

"For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come"

(1 Cor 11:26 KJV)

Paul tells us that every time we participate in the Lord's Supper, we "shew" (KJV) Christ's death until he comes. Practically speaking, what does this mean for us when we participate in the Lord's Supper? By unpacking the component parts of the phrase "ye do shew the Lord's death until he come", we can deepen our understanding of these very familiar words.

Shew

Versions of the Bible usually render the word translated "shew" [*katangellō*] in the King James Version as either "proclaim" or "tell". *Katangellō* literally means to "declare down" and has a strong sense of public sharing. Vincent states that the word means "to proclaim with authority, as commissioned to spread the tidings throughout, down among those that hear them, with the included idea of celebrating or commending."⁷⁵

To attempt to capture the word's meaning, some dynamic translations render *katangellō* as "you are announcing the Lord's death until he comes again" (NIRV). *Katangellō* is used seventeen times in the New

⁷⁵ Marvin Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* (New York: Scribner, 1887)

Testament. It is usually translated as “preach” in the King James Version. Given the focus on preaching in Acts, it is no surprise that *katangellō* is used many times in this book (Acts 4:2; 13:5, 38; 15:36; 16:17, 21; 17:3, 13, 23; 26:23). Whether in the synagogue or on Mars Hill, *katangellō* was the public proclamation of the Gospel. In Philippians, Paul uses the word to capture all the ways that Christ is preached, “What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached [*katangellō*]; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice” (1:18).

In terms of helping us understand 1 Corinthians 11:26, the most relevant occurrences are the two other times that Paul uses *katangellō* in 1 Corinthians:

- “And I, brethren, when I came to you, did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring [*katangellō*] to you the testimony of God” (1 Cor 2:1).
- “Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach [*katangellō*] the gospel should live from the gospel” (1 Cor 9:14).

From the way that *katangellō* is used, both throughout the New Testament and in 1 Corinthians, we can confidently infer that Paul was using this word to describe an act of public preaching.

By taking up the Bread and the Cup, we are preaching about Christ's death. Three key questions emerge from this inference: What is the content of the preaching message? How is the message delivered? Who is the audience for this preaching? The celebration of Passover helps us answer these questions.

Passover and the “Cup of Proclamation”

Passover was clearly on Paul's mind as he was writing to the Corinthian ecclesia about the Lord's Supper. As part of his discourse on the Lord's Supper, Paul grounds the partaking in Passover, “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ?” (1 Cor 10:16). The “cup of blessing” was the third of the four Passover cups. Similarly, by describing the partaking of the Bread and Cup as a “proclamation”, Paul is referring to the second cup of

Passover, the *Maggid*, called the “cup of proclamation”.

The second Passover cup was called the cup of proclamation because it was at this point that the person leading the Seder told the story of Israel’s deliverance from bondage in Egypt. Several commentators have noted the connection between *katangellō* and the Hebrew practice of *Haggadah*. The *Haggadah* (literally, “the telling”) is the historical explanation of the events and meaning of Passover; the connection between Passover and the Lord’s Supper informed many translators’ decision to render *katangellō* as “tell”. In the table below, we also see the strong parallel between the command to “shew” the story of Passover and the command to “shew” Christ’s death, as embodied in the KJV’s translation of *katangellō* as “shew”:

Passover	Lord’s Supper
“And thou shalt <u>shew</u> thy son in that day, saying, ‘This is done because of that which the Lord did unto me when I came forth out of Egypt.’ And it shall be for a... <u>memorial</u> between thine eyes” (Exod 13:8-9 KJV).	“In <u>remembrance</u> of me... ye do <u>shew</u> the Lord’s death till he come” (1 Cor 11:25-26 KJV).

This part of the Passover celebration was deliberately a teaching time, in fulfillment of God’s requirement that the story of deliverance be shared with the next generation of God’s family: “...you shall keep this service. And it shall be, when your children say to you, ‘What do you mean by this service?’ that you shall say, ‘It is the Passover sacrifice of the Lord, who passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt when He struck the Egyptians and delivered our households’” (Exod 12:25-27). As the text indicates, the learning was not to be through passive hearing but rather interactive participation marked by questions and answers.

We have a good understanding of what the content of the “proclamation” was like at the time of Christ. Rabbi Gamaliel (Paul’s teacher) commented extensively on this topic, and his commentary was preserved in the Mishnah⁷⁶. Gamaliel taught that the story must emphasize three things: the lamb, the unleavened bread, and the bitter herbs. He also stated that the “telling” should emphasize that participants must understand that God is saving them, just as He

⁷⁶ The Mishnah (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933)

saved the children of Israel from slavery in Egypt: "In every generation, a man must so regard himself as if he came forth himself out of Egypt." Gamaliel insisted that the participants understand that salvation was not an abstract thing whose only impact was on a long past generation; rather, the Passover demonstrated that the God of Israel continues to save.

We also have a good idea of how the lesson was to be delivered. Gamaliel asserted that the emotional content of the "telling" should be marked by joy, praise, and thanksgiving: "We are bound to give thanks, to praise, to glorify, to honor, to exalt, to extol, and to bless him who wrought all these wonders for our father and for us. He brought us out from bondage to freedom, from sorrow to gladness, and from mourning to a feast-day, and from darkness to great light, and from slavery to redemption; so let us say before him the Hallelujah!" This sense of overflowing joy made the *Maggid* the natural introduction to the Passover celebration's first music; the first two Hallel Psalms (i.e., Psa 113-114) were sung immediately after the "telling".

We also know the audience for the proclamation. The audience was the family of God, from the youngest to the oldest. All were engaged in the telling of God's redemption of His people from the bitter bonds of slavery. The Passover was exclusively for the family of God; to participate in the celebration, a Gentile had to become adopted, entering the family through the covenant of circumcision (Exod 12:43-49).

The Lord's Death

What does it mean to "proclaim", to "tell of", to "preach", Christ's death? Fundamentally, when we proclaim Christ's death, we proclaim our deliverance through the everlasting covenant. This covenant is the Divine plan of salvation, and Christ's death was an essential part of this covenant. The writer to the Hebrews emphasizes this concept by asserting, "And for this reason He is the Mediator of the new covenant, by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions under the first covenant, that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance" (Heb 9: 15). One commentator on Hebrews 9:15 stated, "Jesus is the covenant-victim of the new covenant, the

ratification-sacrifice.”⁷⁷ We participate in the covenant by identifying ourselves with Christ’s death through baptism: “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?” (Rom 6:3).

We can’t proclaim Christ’s death without proclaiming his life. His righteous life made his death the vehicle that enables us to be deemed righteous: “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Cor 5:21). His resurrected life commands us to live new lives now: “Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom 6:4). By “putting on Christ” (Gal 3:27), we proclaim that our lives are marked by a new relationship with God and Christ, no longer constituted as sinners but instead constituted as righteous⁷⁸.

We are also proclaiming the power of Christ’s resurrection over death. Christ’s death provides us with a way to everlasting life: “The opening of the way to everlasting life was by the death of Christ, as all the types showed.”⁷⁹ The Corinthian ecclesia struggled with this concept, and Paul devoted a large component of his first letter to helping them understand the impact of Christ’s resurrection. Paul is emphatic:

For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the first fruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming. Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. (1 Cor 15:21-26)

Participating in the Bread and Cup means proclaiming Christ’s death and his resurrection.

⁷⁷ W.H. Boulton, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Hyderabad: Printland, 1994)

⁷⁸ John Thomas, *Elpis Israel* (Birmingham: CMPA, 1849/ Electronic edition: 2013)

⁷⁹ John Carter, *The Letter to the Hebrews* (Birmingham: CMPA, 1939/Electronic edition 2015)

Until He Comes

Paul connects the proclamation to the coming of Christ. The first-century ecclesia connected attending the Lord's Supper with the coming of Christ. The *Didache* (a kind of first-century ecclesial guide) states: "Let grace come, and let this world pass away. Hosanna to the Son of David. If anyone is holy let him come; if anyone is not, let him repent. Maranatha. Amen"⁸⁰. The only occurrence of Maranatha in the New Testament is in Paul's first message to the Corinthian ecclesia: "...if anyone does not love the Lord, let him be accursed. Marana tha" (1 Cor 16:22 DLNT). *Maranatha* is an Aramaic word that has been translated as:

- "The Lord has come"
- "Lord, come"
- "The Lord is coming"

Some commentators have suggested that Maranatha refers to a prayer used by the first-century ecclesia when it gathered together, especially for the Lord's Supper. Given that Christ's model prayer emphasized the coming of God's kingdom (Matt 6:10), it makes sense that the ecclesia would emphasize this as well. John appears to allude to this practice by using the Greek version of Maranatha to close Revelation: "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev 22:20).

Maranatha's flexible verb tense suggests a connection to the Divine Name of Yahweh. This is related to God's plan of salvation because the past, present, and future are woven into the fabric of the Biblical narrative: "Now the book of God is peculiar in this—it narrates the past, the present, and the future all in one volume."⁸¹ As the chart below demonstrates, the Bible shows that we have been saved, we are being saved, and we will be saved. The fact that the Bible uses past, present, and future tenses to describe our salvation shows that the doctrine of "once saved, always saved" is false.

⁸⁰ *Didache*, earlychristianwritings.com/didache.html

⁸¹ John Thomas, *Elpis Israel* (Birmingham: CMPA, 1849/ Electronic edition: 2013)

Have Been Saved	Are Being Saved	Will Be Saved
Rom 8:24; Eph 2:4-10; 2 Tim 1:9; Titus 3:5; 2 Thess 2:13; Isa 43:11-12; Deut 33:29	1 Cor 1:18; 15:1-2; 2 Cor 2:15; 2 Cor 6:2; Acts 2:47, 4:12; Phil 2:12-13; Heb 7:25; 1 Thess 5:8-10; 1 Pet 3:21 Luke 19:9; Isa 45:20-23; John 3:17; 5:34; 12:47; 1 Tim 1:15	Isa 25:6-9; Joel 2:32; Zech 8:13; 9:16; Matt 10:22; 24:13, 22; John 10:9; Acts 15:11; Rom 5:9-10; 10:9; 10:13; 2 Tim 2:10; 4:18; Heb 1:14; 9:28; 1 Pet 1:3-5, 9; 4:18

When Paul exhorts us to “proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes”, he is not merely telling us to maintain the practice until it becomes fulfilled in the kingdom. He is also exhorting us to be mindful that Christ has come, as embodied in his sacrificial body/blood. Paul is also exhorting us to be mindful of Christ’s current work as our High Priest. Paul is exhorting us to look to the future role of Christ and to plead for his return. Ultimately, Paul is challenging us to live now as citizens and ambassadors of the future kingdom that Christ’s return will establish.

The Memorial Exhortation: Proclaiming the Lord’s Death Until He Comes

Our unpacking of what it means to proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes leads us to think that it sounds very similar to what we call the “exhortation” given when we partake of the Bread and the Cup. A prominent scholar, Joachim Jeremias, believes that the proclamation served exactly this function for the first-century church: “the ‘proclamation of the death of the Lord’ at the Eucharist...must have had the form of a recitation of the words of interpretation followed by an exposition.”⁸²

The exhortation at the Lord’s Table is the time to preach to the family of God. It is a time to tell of our redemption, to proclaim that the Son’s death—and life—has made us truly free (John 8:36). It is the telling of

⁸² Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (Philadelphia: SCM Press, 1966)

our own personal redemption. Paul recognized this, building on his teacher Gamaliel's assertion that "In every generation a man must so regard himself as if he came forth himself out of Egypt" to proclaim, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Gal 2:20). Most of all, it is a joyous proclamation that celebrates the work of Christ in the past, in the present, and in the future: "*Maranatha!*"

CHAPTER TWENTY

In an Unworthy Manner

“Therefore whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.”

(1 Cor 11:27)

One of the most sobering statements in the Bible is, “...whoever eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord” (1 Cor 11:27). How are we to understand this statement? Aren't we all unworthy? At our best, aren't we all unprofitable servants? (Luke 17:10) At our spiritual low points, perhaps we have identified with the lost son's sentiment that we no longer have a place at the family table: “Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son” (Luke 15:21).

At the Lord's Table, Peter shows us how challenging it is for our hearts to grapple with notions of worthiness. In John 13:4-17, Jesus began washing the assembled disciples' feet. Peter resisted, asking him an almost rhetorical question: “Lord, are You washing my feet?” Peter's feelings of unworthiness prompted him to reject Jesus' plan to wash his feet. Jesus patiently responded by essentially saying, “Through faith, accept my washing.”

This is too much for Peter, who rebuked Jesus, “You shall never wash my feet!” Jesus responded by making it clear that participating in the washing was the only way for Peter to “fellowship” (*meros* in Greek)⁸³

⁸³ *Strong's* asserts that here *meros* is equated to fellowship “to have part (fellowship) with one, John 13:8”

with him. Rather than just accept the completeness of Jesus' action, Peter adds more: "Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head!" Jesus responded by confirming that the washing he offers Peter is complete and comprehensive.

The writer to the Hebrews uses this same word for "wash" (*louó*) in a passage that addresses the same concerns that Peter expressed at the Lord's Table:

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (Heb 10:19-22)

Christ's washing has made us worthy of a seat at the Lord's Table.

We are worthy to have a place at the Lord's Table because God, in Christ, made us a part of His family. We give thanks that God has done this: "Giving thanks to God the Father, who hath made us worthy to be partakers of the lot of the saints" (Col 1:12 DRA). Just as the father welcomes the repentant lost son to the family table, God welcomes us to the Lord's Table when we come with a thankful and repentant attitude: "...bring the fatted calf here and kill it, and let us eat and be merry" (Luke 15:23).

It is crucial to note that in 1 Corinthians 11, Paul doesn't state that we are unworthy; he states that our actions at the Lord's Table can be unworthy. Through our relationship to God and Christ through baptism and the continued provision of Divine grace, we are made worthy of a place at the Lord's Table. Paul's use of the concept of unworthiness (Greek *anaxios*, the only occurrence) doesn't relate to the person's eligibility but rather the person's attitude when eating the Bread and drinking the Cup.

If a worthy attitude is marked by thankfulness and repentance, what constitutes an unworthy attitude? Paul tells us that it is the same attitude towards the symbols of Christ's body and blood that Judas and the religious rulers took when they shed Christ's literal blood and crucified his literal body. Phillips' translation captures Paul's thought: "whoever ...eats the bread or drinks the wine without due thought is

making himself like one of those who allowed the Lord to be put to death" (1 Cor 11:27). Paul uses the Greek word *enochos* ("guilty" in the KJV), which carries the literal meaning of being bound as a result of a judgment. Literally, Judas Iscariot and the religious/secular rulers who executed Christ are the only ones who are judged guilty of his death. Figuratively, Paul means that taking an unworthy approach to the Bread and Wine mirrors the same attitude of those who crucified Christ.

Guilty of the Body and Blood

Three main things characterized the attitude of those guilty of Christ's death:

1. They saw Christ's death as an opportunity to satisfy their personal desires: "What are you willing to give me if I deliver Him to you?" (Matt 26:15).
2. They saw Christ's death as an opportunity to exercise power: "But when the vinedressers saw the son, they said among themselves, 'This is the heir. Come, let us kill him and seize his inheritance'" (Matt 21:38).
3. They tried to obstruct the purpose of Christ's work: "If we let him continue what he's doing, everyone will believe in him. Then the Romans will take away our position and our nation" (John 11:48 GW).

These three things were present in some members of the Corinthian ecclesia's approach to the Lord's Table. Some viewed the Lord's Supper as an opportunity to satisfy their personal desires for food and drink (1 Cor 11:20-22), rather than a time to remember Christ. Some members saw the Lord's Table as a way to exercise their own power through the creation of factions within the ecclesia (1 Cor 11:17-18). By treating the Lord's Supper as a dinner party and by creating divisions for personal power, some members at Corinth were obstructing Christ's purpose in commanding us to gather together to remember him.

"Their Heart is Far From Me..."

When disciples separate themselves from Christ, it is like they are guilty of the body and blood of Christ because, “to their own harm, they are crucifying the Son of God again and exposing him to public shame” (Heb 6:6 Mounce). Sadly, we can also distance ourselves from Christ and not even realize it. Recognizing that our heart’s natural state draws us away from God and Christ (Jer 17:9), is the first step towards participating in a worthy manner. In quoting Isaiah 29:13, Jesus tells us that we must examine our hearts (i.e., our thoughts and motivations):

Hypocrites! Well did Isaiah prophesy about you, saying:

“These people draw near to Me with their mouth,

And honor Me with their lips,

But their heart is far from Me.

And in vain they worship Me,

Teaching as doctrines the commandments of men..”

(Matt 15:7-9 qtd. from Isa 29:13)

Jesus warns us that we can participate in worship and yet accomplish nothing if our hearts are far away. At the Lord’s Table, we show our hearts through honest self-examination. By judging ourselves, our hearts show that we treasure our relationship with God and Christ.

Self-examination Prevents Self-incrimination

An unworthy attitude results in guilt, and guilt results in condemnatory judgment: “For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment [*krima*] to himself” (1 Cor 11:29). *Krima* has the strong sense of a “judicial sentence”⁸⁴. Paul uses the word in this sense earlier in 1 Corinthians 6:7: “Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law [*krima*] against one another.”

However, Paul is clearly applying the word to the judgment seat in 1 Corinthians 11, and Jesus uses the word in the same context: “For with what judgment [*krima*] you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you” (Matt 7:1-2). The takeaway from this word study is simple and is embodied in 1 Corinthians 11:31: “If we would examine ourselves first, we would not come under God’s judgment [*krima*]” (GNT). When we come to the

⁸⁴ William Mounce, *Mounce’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006)

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Lord's Table, self-examination prevents self-incrimination.

We have seen that some members participate in the Lord's Supper with a worthy attitude and some members participate in an unworthy manner. Since individual self-examination is the only way to ensure a worthy attitude, it makes sense that we have an individual responsibility at the Lord's Table. Our attitude creates our own guilt; it doesn't make others partaking of the Table guilty. Christ clearly states this basic principle of individual responsibility at his Table: "You have a few names even in Sardis who have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy [*axios*]" (Rev 3:5). When participating in the Lord's Supper, our hearts determine how we will be judged.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

Not Discerning the Lord's Body

"For he who eats and drinks in an unworthy manner eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the Lord's body."

(1 Cor 11:29)

Just as an unworthy approach creates guilt, a failure to discern the Lord's body results in judgment. Paul writes: "For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning [*diakrino*] the body eats and drinks judgment [*krino*] on himself" (1 Cor 11:29 ESV). In the Greek, the cause/effect relationship is highlighted by the use of the same root word, *krino*. Many in Corinth were not discerning the Lord's body. Fundamentally, they did not understand that the Lord's Supper was about sharing. They did not share their food and drink. They did not share their time. They did not share the perception that they had equal status in Christ. In every way, they focused on the things that separated them, rather than on the things they shared. They created factions (*hairesis*) and used the Lord's Supper as an opportunity to divide: "...there must be factions [KJV "heresies"] among you so that it may become clear who among you are genuine" (1Cor. 11:19 Mounce).

Biblically, "heresy" (*hairesis*) doesn't mean a false teaching; rather, the word means a division. The King James Version usually translates *hairesis* as "sect", and rendering it as "false teaching" (as in 2 Pet 2:1) is a mistranslation, as indicated by Young's Literal Translation: "And there did come also false prophets among the people, as also among you there shall be false teachers, who shall bring in besides destructive sects [*hairesis*]." Therefore, a key indicator of not

discerning the Lord's body is to divide the body by determining who is—and who is not—a member of the one body. Those who were dividing the body were not approved (1 Cor 11:19) because they didn't discern that other members were a genuine part of the body. We must remember "God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased" (1 Cor 12:18). When we don't see other brothers and sisters as members of Christ's body, we fail to discern the Lord's body.

Cause and Effect

Paul stated that there is a cause-and-effect relationship between an unworthy approach—characterized by the failure to discern the Lord's body—and members being weak, sick, and asleep. Paul states plainly, "For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep" (1 Cor 11:30). Most commentators have viewed this cause and effect as being either literal or spiritual weakness, illness, or death. For example, Phillips' translation takes the approach that the negative effects were spiritual: "It is this careless participation which is the reason for many feeble and sickly Christians in your church, and the explanation of the fact that many of you are spiritually asleep" (1 Cor 11:30).

Conversely, other commentators have stated that the natural effect of excessive alcohol consumption and sexual promiscuity, both of which some members were engaged in at the Lord's Supper, was being felt by those members (e.g., "Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body, but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body" 1 Cor 6:18). Leaders who brought drunkenness and promiscuity into the practice of the Lord's Supper were a prevailing problem in the first-century ecclesia:

- "They are a disgrace and a stain among you. They delight in deception even as they eat with you in your fellowship meals" (2 Pet 2:13 NLT).
- "These people are a disgrace at the special meals you share with other believers. They eat with you and don't feel ashamed. They are shepherds who care only for themselves" (Jude 12 GW).

The stress caused by a divisive approach and factions in the ecclesia would have also adversely impacted the health of the members:

The exact nature of these illnesses is not revealed, but it seems that the ecclesia was abnormally affected. Some had even fallen asleep. We cannot be certain how these results occurred. The tensions and stress of divisions and disputes in an ecclesia can cause physical illnesses, as some brethren and sisters know to their cost⁸⁵.

I think that the negative impacts are both natural and spiritual. Spiritual illness/weakness, and death are a consistent theme throughout Scripture. So is the concept of the logical consequences of our actions in a fallen world: "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap" (Gal 6: 7). However, Paul's admonitions to the Corinthians do carry an unmistakable spiritual meaning: "that we may not be condemned [*katakrima*]" (1 Cor 11:32). Members striving against each other, judging each other, create an ominous prospect at the judgment seat: "Do not complain about each other, brothers, or you will be condemned [*katakrima*]. Look! The Judge is standing at the door!" (Jas 5:9 ISV).

Discerning the Lord's Body

When we come to the Lord's Table, what steps can we take to discern the Lord's body? We must recognize that the body represents a spiritual space, one dedicated to individual and collective worship, a temple (John 2:21; 1 Cor 6:19). We discern the body when we focus on God and Christ rather than ourselves. The writer to the Hebrews provides clear direction: "...through him, then, we may offer up a sacrifice of praise always to God, that is, the fruit of lips, giving thanks to His name; and of doing good, and of fellowship, be not forgetful, for with such sacrifices God is well-pleased" (Heb 13:15-16 YLT).

Perhaps the most detailed teaching about Christ's body is the concept that the body is a collection of differences joined together by hope and knit together in love through grace. Different gifts, different backgrounds, different roles:

⁸⁵ Michael Ashton, *The Challenge of Corinthians* (Birmingham: CMPA, 2006/Electronic version 2018)

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For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many. (1 Cor 12:12-14)

When we come to the Lord's Table, we should expect to find differences. We should expect that our brothers and sisters will be different from us and that this difference is not always comfortable:

And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor; and our unpresentable parts have greater modesty, but our presentable parts have no need. But God composed the body, having given greater honor to that part which lacks it, that there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. (1 Cor 11:23-26)

We discern the Lord's body when we gather at the table, expecting others to be different from us. Differences are not reasons for division but rather opportunities to praise God for His wise and purposeful arrangement of the body and to grow in Christ:

Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. (Col 3:12-15)

By connecting to Christ as our Head, we ensure that growth will occur.

Conversely, Paul shows us that the body can't grow if it is following the leadership of others. The Colossian ecclesia was following some commands (i.e., "Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle") that appeared wise but were really "the commandments and doctrines of men" (Col 2:20-23). The Colossians had forgotten that every teaching must be aligned with our Head, our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 14:1-11). We discern the Lord's body at his table by connecting all that we say

and do to the Head of the Body—Christ—to the members of his collective body of brothers and sisters. Fundamentally, we discern the Lord's body when we recognize that growth is the body's purpose. We gather together so that the body may:

...grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. (Eph 4:15-16)

We discern the Lord's body by recognizing that Christ is the Head, we are the Body, growth is the purpose, and love holds everything together.

SECTION FIVE

Practices

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO Practice	Historical Practice and Our
CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE the Lord’s Supper	A New “Old” Way of Keeping

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

Historical Practice and Our Practice

“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers... So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people.”

(Acts 2:42-47)

As a community, we strive at all times to replicate the doctrine and practices of the first-century ecclesia. In our community’s early years (1840s-1900), there was considerable discussion about how closely our practice of the Lord’s Supper should mirror the practice of the first century ecclesia. A prominent New Testament scholar draws a stark distinction between the first-century celebration of the Lord’s Supper and its present-day iteration:

It is not in doubt that the Lord’s Supper began as a family meal or a meal of friends in a private home... There can be no two things more different than the celebration of the Lord’s Supper in a Christian home in the first century and in a cathedral in the twentieth century⁸⁶.

As a community, we reject cathedrals, just as we reject the false teachings and deleterious organizational structures that characterized Christianity as it evolved over the centuries. However, by 1900, our community’s practice regarding the Lord’s Supper had become virtually identical to that of many of the Protestant churches of the day.

⁸⁶ William Barclay, *The Lord’s Supper* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2001)

Let me emphasize that our similarity to the churches around us does not mean that our practice of keeping the Lord's Supper is wrong.

For example, we use Bible translations, as do the churches around us. We use Bible study aids; so do the churches around us. We use many of the same hymns and spiritual songs as the churches around us. However, our use of all these things is conscious and thoughtful. We contextualize our use of these things within the framework of our beliefs. This chapter is a call and reminder to apply the same process and rigor to our regular practice of celebrating the Lord's Supper.

This chapter is also a call to revisit our practice in the context of contemporary Western culture, where church attendance has been declining at a rapid and unprecedented rate over the last two decades. The COVID pandemic has accelerated this decline for all religious groups. By way of illustration, the Institute for Family Studies states:

According to data collected in April/May 2020 by Barna Group, one-in-three practicing Christians dropped out of church completely during COVID-19. Last June, the AP broke a story about many houses of worship in the U.S. that were shuttered forever due to the pandemic. What's worse, church membership in the U.S. dropped below 50% for the first time in 2020, according to Gallup data dating back to 1940...A new IFS analysis using the American Family Survey suggests that religious attendance has declined significantly in the past two years. The share of regular churchgoers is down by 6 percentage points, from 34% in 2019 to 28% in 2021. Meanwhile, the share of secular Americans who have never or seldom attended religious services increased by 7 percentage points⁸⁷.

Given our context, we must consider how we can fulfill our responsibility outlined in Hebrews 10:25-26: "And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching."

Our practice is different from the first century, and it is important for us

⁸⁷ Wendy Wang, "The Decline in Church Attendance in COVID America" (*Institute for Family Studies*, Jan. 20, 2022).

to acknowledge that difference, to understand the reasons why it is different, and to reflect on how we can ensure that the differences do not detract from our faith. Our community's approach to the Lord's Supper is a bit of a paradox. The following hypothetical "thought experiment" demonstrates this paradox. Hypothetically speaking, let's put a member of a first-century ecclesia in a time machine so that he could visit us on a Sunday morning. That visitor from the first century would feel right at home with our teaching. However, that same first century visitor would be perplexed at how we were celebrating the Lord's Supper. In this chapter, we will trace the evolution of the Lord's Supper from the first century to the present day. What would our first century visitor tell us is missing from our twenty-first century practice?

The Importance of the Meal

The New Testament provides a great deal of evidence regarding how the early church celebrated the Lord's Supper. In its earliest form, the ecclesia partook of the Bread and Cup each day as part of the evening meal: "And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). One scholar summarizes the evidence by stating:

In the apostolic period the Eucharist was celebrated daily in connection with a simple meal of brotherly love (the Agape), in which the Christians, in communion with their common Redeemer, forgot all distinctions of rank, wealth, and culture, and felt themselves to be members of one family of God⁸⁸.

The connection of the Bread and Cup with a meal was important because, as Protestant theologian Philip Schaff (1819-1893) asserts, eating together has such powerful significance for the cultures of the Mediterranean world. One commentator shows how significant the meal was:

It would be difficult to overestimate the importance of table fellowship for the cultures of the Mediterranean basin in the first century... Mealtimes were far more than occasions for individuals to consume

⁸⁸ Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, Vol. 1 – Apostolic Christianity* ccel.org/ccel/schaff/hcc1.toc.html

nourishment. Being welcomed at a table for the purpose of eating food with another person had become a ceremony richly symbolic of friendship, intimacy, and unity⁸⁹.

The *Didache* (a sort of first-century Ecclesial Guide) emphasizes the connection between meal sharing and fellowship: "Now no one should either eat or drink from your thanksgiving meal, but those who have been baptized into the Lord's name."

We see that the meal was not incidental to the partaking of the Bread and Cup; rather, the meal was an essential part of the celebration that emphasized the new relationships forged by being baptized into Christ. The meal was a tangible symbol of fellowship between believers and Christ and between believers and each other. The meal was the sign of the one body. The way that the meal was shared demonstrated the participants' understanding of fellowship, or lack thereof: "Therefore when you come together in one place, it is not to eat the Lord's Supper. For in eating, each one takes his own supper ahead of others; and one is hungry and another is drunk" (1 Cor 11:20-21).

The meal's centrality is demonstrated by the titles used by the first century ecclesia. Unlike the twenty-first century, where we frequently use symbolic language to refer to the partaking of Bread and Cup (e.g., the "Memorials" or the "Emblems"), the first century ecclesias used titles that emphasized the meal:

- Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:20)
- Love (*agape*) Meal (Jude 12)
- The Lord's Table (1 Cor 10:21)
- The Breaking of Bread (Luke 24:35; Acts 2:42, 20:7)
- Thanksgiving/Eucharist (Luke 22:17, 19; John 6:11, 23; 1 Cor 11:23-24)
- Communion/Fellowship (1 Cor 10:16-21)

We can see how integrated the meal was with the practice of remembering Christ in the manner appointed. Even the two titles not explicitly associated with eating—Thanksgiving and Communion—had

⁸⁹ Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, and I. Howard Marshall. *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1992)

strong implicit connections with the intimacy of eating together. Thanksgiving was strongly associated with the fellowship meal of the Mosaic peace offering; communion (*koinonia*) was understood throughout the Greco-Roman world as a partnership symbolized by a shared meal.

Two Model Meals: Passover (for Jewish Christians) and Symposium (for Gentile Christians)

The gospel was preached to both Jews and Gentiles, and both groups had a cultural tradition of gathering around a meal for discussion and education. For the Jews, the Passover was the foundation upon which the meal component of the Lord's Supper was built. For the Gentiles, the symposium was the foundation for the meal component of the Lord's Supper. Smith comments on the centrality of the meal for both Jews and Gentiles of the Roman world:

Whenever they met as a church, Christians regularly ate a meal together. In this they were no different from other religious groups in their world: for when any group of people on the ancient Mediterranean world met for social or religious purposes, their gatherings tended to be centered on a common meal or banquet. It did not matter whether it was a social or religious occasion; nor what the ethnic group might be, whether Jewish or Greek or some other ethnic group; nor what the social class might be... They followed the form of the banquet, the traditional evening meal, which had become the pattern for all formalized meals in the Mediterranean world in this period⁹⁰.

This evening meal was the *deipnon*; in the New Testament, *deipnon* is frequently used to describe the Lord's Supper: as Christ instituted it (John 13:2, 4), as it was practiced by the first century ecclesia (1 Cor 11:20-21), and as it will be practiced at Christ's return (Rev 19:9, 17; Luke 14:16, 17, 24).

The symposium was like a Passover meal in some respects, yet it was very different in other important areas. Both the symposium and the Passover featured a fellowship meal that was purposeful and celebratory. However, unlike the Passover celebration, the symposium

⁹⁰ Dennis E. Smith. *From Symposium to Eucharist* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2003)

was characterized by excessive consumption of wine, immoral behavior, and socio-economic stratification. The literature of the time shows that the symposium was infamous for all these things. Sadly, all these negative aspects of the symposium impacted the first century ecclesia. In 1 Corinthians 5, Paul reproves the ecclesia for its tolerance of sexual immorality by reminding them that they are celebrating a Passover, not a symposium. Similarly, in 1 Corinthians 11, Paul chastises the ecclesia for its toleration of drunkenness at the Lord's Supper. In both 1 Corinthians and James, the ecclesia is rebuked for privileging some members based on socio-economic status: "For if there should come into your assembly a man with gold rings, in fine apparel, and there should also come in a poor man in filthy clothes, and you pay attention to the one wearing the fine clothes and say to him, 'You sit here in a good place,' and say to the poor man, 'You stand there,' or, 'Sit here at my footstool'" (Jas 2:2-2).

The most frequent kind of symposia had a singular focus: to provide learned and thoughtful conversation on a predetermined topic. It seems that Gentile converts adopted this approach for communal worship at the Lord's Supper. Paul describes the participatory nature of the first century Lord's Supper: "Whenever you come together, each of you has a psalm, has a teaching, has a tongue, has a revelation, and has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification" (1 Cor 14:26). Paul gives similar instructions to the Colossians:

And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful [*eucharistos*]. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks [*eucharisteó*] to God the Father through Him. (Col 3:15-17)

The first-century ecclesias celebrated the Lord's Supper in a way that fostered dialogue and participation. It is important to note that the symposium was to be conducted in good order (*eutaxia*) so that all participants would be edified. Paul uses this language of orderliness in his direction to the Corinthians regarding communal worship: "Let all things be done decently and in order [*taxis*]" (1 Cor 40).

Sacrifice was another purpose for symposia. The concept of sacrifice

as it relates to the Lord's Supper was a double-edged sword for the early ecclesia. On one hand, Gentile converts easily understood the focus on Christ's sacrifice as embodied in the meal. On the other hand, the immoral practices connected with sacrificial meals at pagan temples, and meats offered to idols, were challenging to Gentile believers. Again, we see Paul specifically address these challenges in 1 Corinthians:

- "For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the conscience of him who is weak be emboldened to eat those things offered to idols?" (1 Cor 8:10)
- "...the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's Table and of the table of demons" (1 Cor 10:20-21).

In 1 Corinthians 10, it seems that Paul differentiates between consuming meat sold in markets after the animal had been sacrificed in a pagan temple and conducting the Lord's Supper in a way that resembled a meal in a pagan temple. Verses 14-22 prohibit participating in pagan temple meals or making the Lord's Supper like those meals; conversely, in verses 23-33, Paul makes consuming the sacrificial animals sold in the markets a matter of conscience.

The symposium's fundamental concept—*koinonia*—is familiar to any disciple. *Koinonia* ("fellowship", "sharing", "communion") was the basis for the symposium in the Greco-Roman world of the first century. One scholar asserts the importance of *koinonia* this way: "One of the central concepts defining the theoretical basis for meal ethics is *koinonia* or 'sharing', which refers in a larger sense to the communal nature of the meal."⁹¹ This connection is one reason why Paul so directly contrasts the fellowship of Christ with the fellowship of the symposium, especially the symposia of pagan temples: "Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry. I speak as to wise men; judge for yourselves what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion [*koinonia*] of the blood of Christ? The bread which we

⁹¹ Dennis E. Smith. *From Symposium to Eucharist* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 2003)

break, is it not the communion [*koinonia*] of the body of Christ?" (1 Cor 10:14-16).

Separating the Meal from the Bread and Cup

Beginning in the early second century, the Lord's Supper begins to be separated into two parts. One historian asserts:

At first the communion was joined with the "Love Feast" and was celebrated in the evening in memory of the last supper with Jesus and His disciples. But as early as the beginning of the second century these two exercises were separated and the communion was placed in the morning and the love feast in the evening⁹².

Perhaps this change was made in response to Gentile converts' continuing challenges in understanding how the Lord's Supper was different from the symposia. There was no place at the Lord's Table for drunkenness, immorality, or socio-economic separation. We can infer that the decision to separate the meal from partaking of the Bread and Cup was made to address these ongoing issues.

The decision to separate the meal from the Bread and Cup shows how far the ecclesia was moving away from the people of Israel and its essential understanding that Passover was the foundation for understanding the Lord's Supper:

As the church progressed, it began to lose its Jewish roots. The loss of the Jewishness of the Eucharist entailed the loss of the meal. The bread and wine sanctified a meal in Jewish theology and practice. The bread and wine served the meal and were not independent ritual acts. They were meal ritual acts. But as the church lost sight of their Jewish roots, they lost the connection between the bread and wine and the meal which those elements served and sanctified⁹³.

Once the meal was separated from the Bread and Cup, the Lord's Supper quickly became a ceremony with none of the elemental aspects of a shared meal that marked Christ's (and the early church's)

⁹² Philip Schaff, *History of the Christian Church, Vol. 1 – Apostolic Christianity* ccel.org/ccel/schaff/hcc1.toc.html

⁹³ John Mark Hicks, *Come to the Table: Revisioning the Lord's Supper* (Abilene: Leafwood, 2002)

celebration of it. By the third century, the meal component had become a separate act of charity; for example, Augustine describes it as a supper provided for the poor. There seems to be a concerted effort to remove any vestige of a meal from the celebration of the Lord's Supper; the Council of Laodicea (A.D. 367) forbade the practice of having a meal with the Bread and Cup. The Synod of Hippo (A.D. 393) and the Synod of Carthage (A.D. 397) both attempted to ban the Agape Feast entirely and to ensure that it was never linked with the Lord's Supper again. By A.D. 692, the Agape Feast was completely banned because it was "sinful". It is not a coincidence that the meal was separated from the Bread and Cup during the same time period when a significant number of false beliefs began to be adopted. The ecclesias had forgotten the fundamental lesson of the Gospel message being shared among the Gentiles, a lesson that Christ shared with the Samaritan woman: "...salvation is of the Jews" (John 4:22).

Revival of the Truth and the Lord's Supper

As our community began to come together in the 19th century, its focus on the Bible was apparent in the way that believers approached the Lord's Supper. Our community's understanding that "salvation was of the Jews" was foundational, and the Lord's Supper connection to Passover was emphasized:

- "The bread and wine of 'the Lord's supper' are the remains of the Passover, which are to be shared by the circumcised of heart and ears, until Christ comes."⁹⁴
- "The reference is to the 'breaking of bread', or 'the Lord's supper'... was originally instituted when Jesus and his disciples were met together for the last time to observe the Jewish Passover."⁹⁵

A helpful standard was set for addressing the many questions that

⁹⁴ John Thomas, *Elpis Israel* (Birmingham: CMPA, 1849/ Electronic edition: 2013)

⁹⁵ Robert Roberts, *Christendom Astray* (Birmingham: CMPA, 1884/Electronic edition: 2014)

would arise regarding how the Lord's Supper should be conducted:

To eat bread and drink wine at the table of the Lord is to "offer up spiritual sacrifice". This offering is "acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet 2:5), when offered, not in the letter, but in the spirit of the law... We conclude, therefore, that the quality of the bread matters not, so that we eat it in purity and truth, discerning the Lord's body. To strain at the quality of the bread and wine is to Judaize; and to eat unleavened bread and drink unadulterated wine with the old leaven, or the leaven of malice and wickedness, is to swallow a camel. We walk by faith, not by our five senses.⁹⁶

By focusing on the spirit of the law rather than the letter of the law, the community was able to address many potentially divisive questions.

Over the next few decades, questions about the Lord's Supper abounded and persisted. From the 1850s to the 1890s, there was some controversy about a variety of aspects of the Lord's Supper. Some examples are:

- What day should the partaking of the Bread and Cup take place?
 - Sunday?
 - Saturday?
 - Any day?
- Does the Cup have to contain alcohol?
 - Grape juice?
 - One Cup?
 - Many Cups?
- Must the Bread be leavened?
 - Or unleavened?

The earlier standard was reinforced in April 1892 in the *Christadelphian* magazine:

The crotchet on this question is nothing new. It was buzzing about in

⁹⁶ John Thomas, (*Herald of the Kingdom*, 1856)

the days of Dr. Thomas, who had no patience with it. The answer is this: "Where there is no law, there is no transgression." Those who say we ought to have unleavened bread and unfermented wine, are "wise above that which is written." The Lord has left no directions, and therefore we are free.⁹⁷

In this response, the editor of the *Christadelphian* concedes that the impetus for these questions is a sound desire to "get as near the original as possible." However, he properly rejects any attempts to make hard and fast rules about how the Breaking of Bread must be conducted: "The command is limited to the act generally of eating bread and drinking wine in remembrance. We obey this command when we eat bread and drink wine, though the loaf we eat be differently shaped and compounded, and our wine differently tasted and made."

It seems that initially some ecclesias met twice on Sunday, one of which was an evening Lord's Supper. For example, the ecclesia in Edinburgh reported in 1852 that they met twice on Sunday: "It was agreed to meet on the following Sunday, in a church capacity—at eleven o'clock in the forenoon, for worship and mutual instruction; and at half-past six in the evening, to eat the Lord's Supper." Discussions about the "correct" time continued; in March 1871, the editor of the *Christadelphian* magazine was asked to respond to the question, "At What Hour Should the Breaking of Bread Be Attended To?" His response was clear—the time did not matter:

No doubt the meeting at which Jesus instituted the supper was held in the evening, but there is no evidence that a particular hour of the day formed a feature of the ordinance as apostolically enjoined...The breaking of bread is essentially a spiritual institution—that is, designed for an effect on the mind, and that effect the bringing to remembrance of the Lord's death till he come. If this purpose is accomplished, the end is attained, at whatever period of the day.⁹⁸

It is interesting to note that, despite this definitive answer, questions about the "correct" time persisted. In the June 1898 issue of *The Christadelphian*, the editor repeated his answer, word for word.⁹⁹ By

⁹⁷ Robert Roberts, *The Christadelphian* (April, 1892)

⁹⁸ Robert Roberts, *The Christadelphian* (March, 1871)

⁹⁹ Robert Roberts, *The Christadelphian* (June, 1898)

focusing on the Bread and Cup as “essentially a spiritual institution”, divisive avenues of inquiry were defused.

Titles

As the community grew, they rejected some titles for the Lord's Supper, began to use some titles customarily, and coined others. Although “Eucharist” is a Biblical term (e.g., Luke 22:17, 19; 1 Cor 11:24), we can infer that the community rejected that title because of its association with other churches. For example, we see this title used by way of contrast: “They separate from the eucharistia the giving of thanks (that is, 'the Lord's Supper')...The sacrament of the eucharist (the Lord's Supper), is converted.”¹⁰⁰ Other Biblical titles such as the “Lord's Supper” and the “Breaking of Bread” were embraced, as was the strong connection to Passover. Other titles, not used in Scripture but reflective of Scriptural principles, became widely used. These coinages—such as “Emblems” and “Memorials”—are apparent in important texts: “The breaking of bread brings the whole idea into focus. Jesus asks us to recognize in the emblems the memorials of his body given for his brethren.”¹⁰¹ Perhaps because the meal was so completely separated from the celebration of the Bread and Cup, titles such as “The Memorials” and “The Emblems” became widely used.

The Order of Service

In the early years of the community, there was wide latitude in how ecclesias celebrated the Lord's Supper. In 1854, this was the suggested order of service¹⁰²:

- Prayer by the presiding brother
- Singing
- Scripture-Reading (Genesis-Job, Psalms-Malachi, Matthew-Acts, Romans-Revelation).
- Singing

¹⁰⁰ John Thomas, *Eureka: an Exposition of the Apocalypse* (n.p., n.pub., n.d.)

¹⁰¹ Robert Roberts, *Ways of Providence* (Birmingham: CMPA, 1912)

¹⁰² John Thomas, *The Herald Of The Kingdom and Age to Come*, 1854

- Contribution, and Reception of Members, if any
- Breaking of Bread, and Cup
- Exposition of the Word to edification
- Singing
- Prayer

There was pressure to standardize the way in which ecclesias observed the Breaking of Bread. For example, there was concern about how some ecclesias in Virginia conducted the Lord's Supper. Members of these ecclesias went up to the table individually to receive Bread and Wine:

The table, say they, is the Lord's, not theirs. He brake the bread and GAVE it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat. Christ not being here in person to break it. "His body, the Ecclesia," breaks it instead—takes and eats. Each one rises, walks to the table, and helps himself. By this custom, they relieve themselves of the responsibility of handing the elements to those who might be improper persons. Whoever rises and takes it does so on his or her own responsibility... With them, therefore, the breaking and eating is not a test of fellowship. They hand it to no one, and withhold it from none.¹⁰³

In 1870, the pages of *The Christadelphian* responded to correspondents who were insisting that those Virginian ecclesias be directed to change their practice:

I spoke in the forenoon to the brethren at the schoolhouse, where they ordinarily meet. In their breaking of bread, each one rises and walks to the table, where he helps himself. This is the practice in Washington, Norfolk, and Bedford County, Virginia, as well as in this city. I do not think it obtains elsewhere. If I am not mistaken, it originated in Norfolk to get quit of the responsibility of offering the bread to persons of whom they might stand in doubt. No principle being involved in it, no trouble need ensue about it. There are some tempers, however, that will make trouble out of anything; but they are tempers unsanctified by the truth. Two or three such have strained at this gnat, who have swallowed a camel, removing them from the pale of all Christian fellowship

¹⁰³ John Thomas, (*The Ambassador of the Coming Age*, 1866)

whatsoever!¹⁰⁴

In the practice of these ecclesias, we see an early theme in the way they approached the Lord's Table. Just as in 1854—when the early statement of faith emphasized that it was “the Lord's table, not the table of the Association”¹⁰⁵—twenty years later, these ecclesias had the same approach.

Standardizing the Order of Service

In 1883, the Ecclesial Guide sought to standardize much of the community's practices. These guidelines indicate that by this time, the Breaking of Bread was generally held on Sunday morning and that it had no meal component whatsoever. Here is the suggested order of service¹⁰⁶:

That the following order be observed at our first-day meetings:

- MORNING:
 1. singing;
 2. reading two of the Scripture selections for the day by the Bible Companion;
 3. an interval for brief fraternal announcements;
 4. prayer;
 5. singing;
 6. exhortation (not to exceed half an hour);
 7. breaking bread and drinking wine, after thanks by the presiding brother for each;
 8. collection;
 9. singing;
 10. exhortation (not to exceed a quarter of an hour);

¹⁰⁴ John Thomas, (*The Christadelphian*, October 1870)

¹⁰⁵ John Thomas, “Constitution of the Royal Association of Believers”, 1854

¹⁰⁶ Robert Roberts, *A Guide to the Formation and Conduct of Ecclesias* (Birmingham: CMPA, 1883)

11. singing;

12. prayer.

With minor variations, this is the manner in which we, as a community, celebrate the Lord's Supper. As disciples, no matter where we visit, we can expect to meet with the local ecclesia on Sunday morning to participate in a meeting that is coordinated by a single person, that begins and ends with communal prayer, that includes Bible readings, that has a time to hear words of encouragement, that contains communal prayer for Bread and Cup, that provides opportunity to eat bread and drink wine, and that brings the congregation together in shared songs.

Our Community Practice and the Practice of First Century Ecclesias

The elements of communal worship outlined in the Ecclesial Guide clearly follow many of the practices of the first century ecclesia, which were built on the foundation of the Gentile symposium and the Jewish Passover. Both the symposium and the Passover featured a "host", a role corresponding to our current presider. Both the symposium and the Passover included a time focused on texts, which corresponded to our Bible readings. Both the symposium and the Passover had a time for sharing edifying information, which corresponded to our exhortation. Both the symposium and the Passover included prayers and songs.¹⁰⁷

We can see how well aligned our order of service is with the Biblical passages that describe the communal practice of celebrating the Lord's Supper after Christ instituted the Bread and Cup. From Acts 20:7-9, we see that the ecclesia met on the first day of the week and that the order of service included an exhortation. The passage in 1 Corinthians 11:17-34 demonstrates a focus on the Bread and the Cup (including prayers for both) and the importance of self-reflection. Paul also discusses communal worship in 1 Corinthians 14, stressing the integral elements of Bible reading, teaching, and prayer. Colossians

¹⁰⁷ Chapters Nine and Ten of the *Didache* demonstrate that there was a clear order of service for the first-century church. These chapters provide examples for the prayers in the order of service (i.e., the Bread, the Cup, and the closing prayer).

3:12-17 describes Bible reading, teaching, prayer, and song, as does a parallel passage in Ephesians 5:17-21. It is fair to say that the way we celebrate the Lord's Supper captures all of the essential components as noted in the New Testament record.

However, our order of service is also different from how first-century ecclesias observed the Lord's Supper. For example, in our celebration of the Lord's Supper, one person speaks, many listen, and there is limited opportunity for dialogue. In the first century, "proclaiming the Lord's death" meant a much higher level of interaction between participants than we have in our current practice. We know that proclaiming means having a dialogue. The Lord's Supper, as initially practiced, was a dialogue, not a monologue. We need to explore how we can create structures and practices that move us further from monologue and closer to dialogue.

The shared meal of the first century observance enabled a greater degree of participation by those present. There were certainly times when all participants focused their quiet attention: during the exhortation, during the readings, and during the prayers. However, the meal also provided a significant amount of time for conversation amongst smaller groups of participants. This conversation deepened the bonds of fellowship between participants. Our current practice places a spotlight on the presider and exhorter and provides no opportunity for anyone else to engage in dialogue, discussion, or inquiry. Unlike the first century celebration, the twenty-first century celebration doesn't enable most participants to share their knowledge, ask questions, and deepen their relationships with one another. Therefore, we must ask ourselves, "How can we structure our celebration of the Lord's Supper to increase the level of engagement for all members who come to the Lord's Table?"

Although there were formal periods during the Lord's Supper (e.g., prayer for and partaking of the Bread and Cup), in general, the first century practice was much less formal than its twenty-first century iteration. We can think of the special meals that we celebrate with our extended family. There are formal times when everyone at the table has his or her attention focused on the words of one person. These times have an inherent formality because all are quiet while one speaks. I can share one example from my own family's practice of the

Thanksgiving meal: my youngest daughter began the practice of each person at the table sharing what they were most thankful for. One person speaks, and everyone at the table is focused on the speaker. However, the majority of the time at our family Thanksgiving is spent in more intimate, close conversation between smaller groups at the table. Our family recognizes that both the formal time and the informal time are important and highly valued. In terms of our community's current practice of the Lord's Supper, I think that we must ask ourselves, "How can we make the Lord's Supper a celebration that includes both the opportunity for appropriately formal times and the chance for much needed more informal times that deepen our relationships with each other?"

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

A New “Old” Way of Keeping the Lord’s Supper

“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers... So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people.”

(Acts 2:42-47)

If we recognize that there are a few important differences between the way that the first-century ecclesias celebrated the Lord’s Supper and the way that we partake of the Bread and Cup in the twenty-first century, then what should we do? The twenty-first century is in general marked by a sense of fragmentation and isolation. So, then, how can we recapture the connected “family feeling” that marked the observances of the first century, built as they were on the Passover and the symposium? In 1892, it was wisely observed in *The Christadelphian* that, in our keeping of the Lord’s Supper, it was good “to get as near the original as possible”, with the caution that this idea must not be “pushed too far”.¹⁰⁸ In terms of potential changes to our community practice, what is “good” and what is “too far”?

It is certainly “too far” to completely upend our current approach and return exclusively to the shared meal format of the first century. The current format is an integral part of our community’s culture, and any

¹⁰⁸ Robert Roberts, *The Christadelphian* (April, 1892)

potential change needs to honor that reality. Furthermore, the larger the number of participants, the more challenging it is to celebrate a meal-based Lord's Supper.

However, there is a reason why Christ instituted the Bread and Cup as a meal. There is a reason why the meal was an integral part of communal worship for the first two centuries. One writer expresses the reason this way:

It is significant that Jesus gave us a meal as the central rite of Christian remembrance. He could have just told his disciples, "Remember the idea of me. Remember these theological concepts of me in your brain." Instead, he told them to "do this in remembrance of me" (1 Cor 11:24) as he broke real bread and poured real wine. Take, eat. Take, drink. Physical actions...God could have sent us a PowerPoint presentation with five ideas to believe in order to be saved. Instead he sent a person.¹⁰⁹

I think that the physical meal is especially important for those of us in Western countries who live increasingly disembodied or fragmented digital lives.

How can we restore the meal in order to help recapture the original intent and practice of the Lord's Supper? One option worth exploring is to regularly conduct a meal-based Lord's Supper at a time other than Sunday morning. The advantage of exploring new Lord's Supper formats outside of Sunday morning is clear: the regular services are not disrupted in any way. I know of one ecclesia who holds a Lord's Supper one Saturday evening a month in addition to its regular Sunday morning service.

What would another format for the Lord's Supper look like? From Biblical and historical evidence, we know that it would have the following elements:

Host

In both the Passover and symposium settings, there was a host. From the synoptic gospels, it is clear that Jesus assumed the role of host

¹⁰⁹ Brett McCracken, *The Wisdom Pyramid* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2021)

when instituting the Lord's Supper.

Focus on the Bread and Cup

Numerous Biblical passages (e.g., 1 Cor 11:17-34), as well as historical evidence (e.g., *Didache*) demonstrate a focus on the Bread and the Cup, including public prayers for both.

Bible Reading

Communal Bible reading was an important part of worship, prompting Paul to emphasize this to Timothy as essential: "...be sure to keep on reading the Scriptures in worship" (1 Tim 4:13 CEV). Historical evidence is equally emphatic; one early Christian writer underscored the importance of public reading during the Lord's Supper: "We meet to read the books of God."¹¹⁰

Singing

There is much Biblical evidence for the practice of singing spiritual songs as part of the Lord's Supper (Col 3:16-17; Eph 5:19-20). For first century Christians, familiar with the prominent role that music played in the Passover and the symposium, such communal singing would have seemed to be a natural part of the Lord's Supper.

Exhortation/Proclamation

As noted in the earlier chapter entitled "Showing the Lord's Death", a plethora of Biblical and historical evidence demonstrates that during the Lord's Supper there was a time set aside for communal teaching. This was a vital part of communal worship (Acts 20:7-9; 1 Cor 14:26; 1 Tim 4:13).

Two words are most frequently used to describe this component:

¹¹⁰ Valeriy A. Alkin quotes Tertullian in "The Reading of Scripture in the Gathering of the Early Church" in *The Earliest History of the Christian Gathering: Origin, Development and Content of the Christian Gathering in the First to Third Centuries* (n.p.: Brill, 2010)

exhort and edify (Rom 12:8; 1 Cor 14:3). In the New Testament Greek, the word *paraklesis*, which is translated as “exhort”, carries a strong sense of “comfort”, and the word translated as “edify” (*oikodomeō*) literally means “to build up”. Paul emphasized the need for orderliness in this aspect of the Lord’s Supper (1 Cor 14:26-40).

One Possible Format for Celebrating the Lord’s Supper

The ecclesia I referenced above built the format for the Saturday evening Lord’s Supper on the practice of the first-century ecclesia, keeping in mind the essential elements listed above. The Passover seder also provided a helpful organizational structure.

One person is designated to host the discussion. The host identifies the Biblical topic for discussion, readings, etc. and sends discussion questions ahead of time so that participants can be appropriately prepared. The host shares a Bible study designed to comfort and build up. The format of the Saturday evening Lord’s Supper is as shown below:

Part	Components
Preliminary Course	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The host welcomes everyone • Group prayer • Bible reading (whole group)
Time for Teaching (Main Course)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The host shares a brief Scripture study on the topic with the whole group • The host facilitates discussion of the study, exploration of questions, and generating new questions (combination of the whole group and smaller groups) • Reading related to Bread (whole group) • Prayer for Bread (whole group) • Partaking of Bread (whole group) • Discussion (combination of the whole group and

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	smaller groups)
After Supper (Dessert Course)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reading related to Cup (whole group)• Prayer for Cup (whole group)• Discussion (combination of the whole group and smaller groups)
Singing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Singing• Small group discussion

Let’s illustrate how the format worked by looking at one example. On one occasion, the Brother who was hosting the Lord’s Supper chose “Eating Flesh and Drinking Blood” as the topic for the proclamation. The reading was John 6. The questions for discussion were:

1. What do you think Jesus meant by “unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you” (John 6:53)?
2. What other teachings of Jesus could be thought of as “hard sayings”?
3. Many of Jesus’ disciples no longer walked with Jesus after the hard saying. Have you ever felt like no longer walking with Jesus?
4. Why was Peter faithful when so many others fell away?
5. What parts of John 6 especially resonated with you?

The meal began with appetizers shared by the fifteen brothers and sisters attending the Lord’s Supper. John 6:22-71 was read (round-robin style) just prior to the proclamation. The host shared his study, which took about 10 minutes. Questions #1 and #2 were discussed and new questions were developed. The discussion closed as the meal transitioned from the appetizer course to the main course.

The host read 1 Corinthians 11:23-24 to introduce the Bread. Another Brother offered a prayer for the Bread. The baptized participants partook of the Bread. Then questions #3 and #4 were discussed, as

well as a conversation on a question that a participant had raised earlier (i.e., “Were the people wrong to follow Jesus just because he was feeding them?”). The discussion came to an end as the meal transitioned from the main course to dessert.

The host then read 1 Corinthians 11:25-26 to introduce the Cup. Another Brother offered a prayer for the Cup. The baptized participants partook of the Cup. The discussion resumed with question #5. On this evening, participants revisited question #3 and shared some powerful testimonies about challenging times in their own discipleship journeys. The Lord's Supper ended with some participants choosing to sing and others choosing to listen to the singing as they cleaned up the meal.

There are clearly many other possible formats that integrate the meal with a time for Bible teaching and the partaking of Bread and Cup. The key principles are:

- Provide time for Bible teaching (i.e., “proclaiming the Lord's death”).
- Provide time for discussion, both with the whole group and in smaller groups (e.g., in twos and threes). This ecclesia has found that a 50 percent whole group/50 percent small group discussion ratio has worked well.
- Prepare for discussion by providing topics and questions prior to the Lord's Supper.
- Plan how the flow of the meal will enable the teaching time, the discussion time, and the partaking of Bread and Cup. A three-part format of appetizer, main course, and dessert has worked well in the North American context. However, disciples should reflect on what dining customs they have in their culture and how those customs might be adapted to the Lord's Supper.
- Concerns about the food should be minimized. No participant should be overburdened by concerns about the meal (Luke 10:40). This ecclesia has never assigned participants to bring food; rather, the expectation is that participants will bring either an appetizer, or a main course, or a dessert.
- Ecclesias should recognize their strengths and adapt the format accordingly. For example, this ecclesia isn't blessed with

musicians or a musical culture. However, an ecclesia with many musicians would want to include music throughout the Lord's Supper format.

- The number of participants impacts how the Lord's Supper is enacted. This ecclesia has celebrated a Saturday evening Lord's Supper with as few as five participants and as many as thirty participants. The larger the group, the more important it is for the format to enable people to interact with those seated near them.
- This ecclesia has tried a variety of seating arrangements: square, U-shaped, many small tables, etc. Each arrangement has been successful.

With these principles in mind, what kind of format do you think would work best in your ecclesia?

Impacts

This ecclesia has held these Saturday evening Lord's Suppers for a few years and it has been impactful. Because of the dynamic inherent in dialogue and discussion, each Lord's Supper has been unique. Some evenings have had predominantly whole-group interactions, while others have been mostly small-group interactions. One thing that has characterized all the Lord's Suppers is that participants have come away with a strong connection to the other members at the table. One Sister described the impact in this way:

The Lord's Supper has helped me know my brothers and sisters in a new way. I know them through the questions they ask and the stories they share. The shared meal creates a connection that doesn't seem to happen in classes. The format also removes a kind of barrier between the speaker and the audience that I feel happens too frequently in our regular Sunday morning meetings. The meal seems to help everyone stop acting and be real with each other. People take off their masks and share their struggles and victories in Christ.

I admit, I was a skeptic about the Lord's Supper idea. I thought that we would struggle to have the right level when it came time to eat the bread and drink the cup. I was wrong. At every Lord's Supper I've been

to, people take the bread and cup with a quiet reverence that is very moving. Maybe I feel this way because I feel more connected to the other members of the body because I have heard their voice, listened to their stories, and thought about their questions.

Some members of that ecclesia have never attended the Lord's Supper on Saturday evenings because they feel that the Sunday morning service meets their needs. Many members of the ecclesia participate in both the Lord's Supper on Saturday evening and the next day's Sunday morning service. A small minority of members attend the Lord's Supper exclusively.

Why Try a "New" Old Way of Celebrating the Lord's Supper?

As a community, we, like all Christian churches in post-pandemic Western culture, are struggling with diminished attendance, especially on Sunday mornings. Some churches around us have responded by attempting to make their services more "entertaining" through a variety of means. Some churches around us have responded by dramatically changing the Gospel message to a "prosperity Gospel". Both of these approaches are scripturally unsupportable.

I contend that Christ's disciples don't need to be entertained—they need to be engaged. Disciples don't need false promises of a life bereft of hardship and challenge; they need to be exhorted to lead lives of sacrifice and faith. Our response to declining attendance must be to explore ways to engage each other, to encourage each other in times of challenge, and to exult with one another in times of blessing. In these last days, how can we truly proclaim Christ's death until he comes?

Perhaps a meal-based Lord's Supper is one way that we can respond. In *A Meal with Jesus*, Tim Chester writes:

When we recapture the Lord's Supper as a feast of friends, celebrated as a meal in the presence of the spirit, then it will become something that we earnestly desire. It will become the high point of our life together as the people of God. In this sad and broken world, the Lord's

Supper is a moment of joy, because it's a moment of the future.¹¹¹

If we love those members (and potential members) who don't have the same appreciation for Sunday morning services that we do, then we must explore ways to enable the family of God to come together in joyful and reverent remembrance, just as our Lord commanded.

We must do whatever we can to recapture the purpose of the Lord's Supper as a celebration of God's family: "God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure" (Eph 1:5 NLT). The Passover, the great prototype of the Lord's Supper, was all about God's covenant family coming together to learn, to be joyful, to give thanks, and to remember. The Lord's Supper, made superior to Passover by Christ, enables us to share in all those things and to celebrate the new covenant made possible by the atoning work of Jesus, who has redeemed us to God by his blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation (Rev 5:9). As we await our Lord's return, we are called to do all that we can to emulate the first ecclesia's joyful participation in his supper (Acts 2:46). Just as in the first century, by doing so we will strengthen our ecclesias and attract people around us to the gospel's message of salvation.

¹¹¹ Tim Chester, *A Meal with Jesus* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2011)

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