

1 Corinthians 11:17-34
Exodus 24
Psalm 105

“The Lord’s Supper”

August 3, 2014

In Exodus 24, we hear about the book of the covenant and the blood of the covenant.

The book of the covenant consists of Exodus 20-23 –
which is read to the people – and to which they profess obedience.
The blood of the covenant is the blood of the sacrifices,
which is sprinkled on the people.

Exodus 24 is the first worship service recorded in Scripture.

It’s description of the relationship between the book of the covenant (the scriptures)
and the blood of the covenant (the sacrifice)
is crucial for understanding biblical worship.

The book of the covenant (the scriptures) is what gives meaning to the sacrifice.

Without the scriptures, the sacrifices become idolatrous.
(When Aaron made the golden calf,
he offered sacrifices – but he did so *contrary* to the book of the covenant,
which said, “You shall not make any graven image...”)
So without the book of the covenant, the blood of the covenant is meaningless.

But the blood of the covenant is what gives power to the scriptures.

Without the sacrifice, what can the book of the covenant do?
In Exodus 19, God had said that if even an animal touches the mountain,
it shall be stoned to death.
But now in Exodus 24, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and 70 elders
all go part way up the mountain!
How did they get there?
Through the blood of the covenant!
So without the blood of the covenant, the book of the covenant is powerless.

In Psalm 105 we sing about God’s faithfulness to his covenant –

how God *remembered* his holy promise to Abraham,
and therefore gave his people “bread from heaven,”
water from the Rock,
and gave to his people he inheritance of the nations.

Sing Psalm 105, st. 1-3, 6, 8-9

Read 1 Corinthians 11:17-34

About the other things I will give directions when I come.

Have you ever wondered what these “other things” were?

It’s worth remembering that there were lots of things that the apostles said.

But God only thought it necessary for us to have *these things*.

Last time we were talking about head coverings –
and now we are suddenly talking about the Lord’s Supper again.
What is the connection between the two parts of chapter 11?

Hans Fror tries to summarize the connection between the problems in chapter 11
by using a fictional voice of a poor Christian woman in Corinth:

“They’re bothering about veils, as though one had only to throw away a bit of material
and everyone would be equal at the Lord’s table....
‘Not slave and free, not poor and rich!’
That makes me laugh!
Clearly the better class gentlemen have been looked after
for quite some time in the dining room when our kind comes rushing along.
They eat lavishly, drink the finest wines....
They mix up the well-laid table of the master of the house with the Lord’s table....
If we’re lucky, all that’s left from the shared meal is a bit of bread and a sip of wine.”
(Fror in AT, 851)

People sometimes wonder
how come the Lord’s Supper is such a “stylized” meal?
It’s clear that in the OT, the covenant meal was a whole *meal!*
And it seems clear as well that in the NT, the Lord’s Supper started off as a meal.

But now we just have a bite of bread and a sip of wine, and we call it a Supper!

The reason can be found (in part) here in 1 Corinthians
as Paul says that the breaking of the bread and the blessing of the cup
is what is distinctive about the Lord’s Supper.
This is what matters!
Indeed, that’s why Paul urges the Corinthians to eat their meals at home –
and focus the liturgical action on the bread and the cup.

Paul says that we should focus on the sacramental actions of
Taking bread, giving thanks, breaking, and eating it.
Taking the cup, blessing it, and drinking it.

1. “When You Come Together as a Church” – Divisions and the Lord’s Supper (v17-22)

¹⁷ *But in the following instructions I do not commend you, because when you come together it is not for the better but for the worse.* ¹⁸ *For, in the first place, when you come together as a church, I hear that there are divisions among you.*

We saw last time that Paul had commended the Corinthians in v2
(probably referring to their letter),
but now he rebukes them for something that was *not* in their letter –
but something that he has heard from those who have brought their complaints to him.

Paul now returns to the theme of division and faction.

At the beginning of 1 Corinthians, Paul objected to the development of “parties” within the church:

“I am of Paul, I am of Apollos, I am of Cephas, I am of Christ.” (1:12)
Christ is *not* divided.

Think about how this works today:

“I am of Calvin, I am of Luther, I am of the Pope.”

And many Christians today, frustrated with the divisions in the church will say,
“A plague on all your houses, I am of Christ.”

Around the year 1800,

Alexander Campbell and Barton Stone grew frustrated with denominations,
so they rejected all denominational labels
and started churches that had “no creed but Christ.”

They called themselves simply “Christian churches”
or “Disciples of Christ.”

But rather than unite the church of Jesus Christ,
all they succeeded at doing was start another denominational faction!

That’s why Paul says that this is the *wrong answer*.

If you reject Calvin, Luther, and the Pope in order to create a “Christ-faction,”
then you are no different from the Calvinists, Lutherans, and Papists!

Christ only has one church –

and that church includes Calvinists, Lutherans, and Papists.

Therefore, the only way to follow Christ is to love *all* of his people.

And Paul explains why these factions exist in verses 18-19:

And I believe it in part,^[d] ¹⁹ for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized.

Yeah, you should probably hear at least a bit of sarcasm in Paul’s voice!

Paul does not want to see factions in the church!

He doesn’t think that factions are a good thing!

But he sees that God uses this (as throughout all of OT history!),
because there is nothing like faction and division
to reveal those who are genuine!

But then in verse 20, Paul zeroes in on his target:

²⁰ *When you come together, it is not the Lord's supper that you eat. ²¹ For in eating, each one goes ahead with his own meal. One goes hungry, another gets drunk. ²² What! Do you not have*

houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing? What shall I say to you? Shall I commend you in this? No, I will not.

They are supposed to be gathering for the Lord's supper,
but Paul says that when they come together it is *not* the Lord's supper.
They are acting like a group of friends who get together for a private meal,
ignoring those who do not belong to the "in" group.

If you think of this in modern terms, you might think of a potluck dinner –
but that's not the way communal meals worked in the ancient world.

Communal meals in the ancient world
generally only included people of the same socio-economic status.
Ordinary homes would allow for perhaps a dozen people in the "dining room"
with another 30-40 in the "atrium" – or central hallway.
Servants and other "lower class" people would be present,
but they did not participate in the meal –
at most, they might get some scraps or leftovers
(think of the woman who anointed Jesus' feet with her hair –
no one was surprised that a strange woman walked in
[that was considered normal]
but no one would have thought of offering her a seat at the table!

Paul is challenging some of the central social practices of the Roman world.
Communal meals were *all about* social status – who is "in" and who is "out."
Who gets invited into the "dining room"?
Who gets to recline with the patron and his friends?
They will get the best food and wine!
Who is left out in the atrium?
They will get the scraps – if any are left over.

Paul is saying that *all* of Christ's people must be given a seat at the table –
and, what is more, at the *same* table!
It's not enough to give them the scraps out in the courtyard!

Indeed, Paul goes so far as to say that the Corinthian malpractice
is sufficient to invalidate the whole sacrament.

"When you come together, it is *not* the Lord's supper that you eat."
The Lord's supper is the place where all of God's people come together
to partake of the body and blood of Christ.
Just because a person says that they are having the Lord's Supper doesn't mean it is!

In verse 22, Paul rebukes them:

Do you not have houses to eat and drink in? Or do you despise the church of God and humiliate those who have nothing?

Paul's point is simple:

if you want to have friends over for a meal – fine! Go right ahead!
But *don't call it the Lord's Supper!!!*

If you and your friends are having a banquet in your triclinium –
and you only give the poor folk in the atrium a piece of bread and a cup of wine –
that's *not* the Lord's Supper!

I want to point something out here.

There are many today who wish to emphasize the importance of the “household” –
particularly the role of the “father” in the home.

Some have gone so far as to put familial authority higher than church authority.
But look at what Paul is doing here.

Paul is objecting to the encroachment of “household-power” into the church.

At a time when the church met in homes –
where patrons were immensely influential in the church –
Paul strongly objects to patrons running the church,
and treating it like an extension of their household authority.

Paul is no egalitarian.

He is not arguing for a democratic form of congregational church government.

Rather, he is stressing the centrality of *communal participation in Christ*
at the Lord's Table.

A cross-centered life – a cross-shaped life –
will draw the strong and powerful in the church
to a life of humility and putting others first.

There *are* powerful patrons in Corinth.

And Paul is not trying to eliminate them from the church!

Paul wants them to use their influence in the service of the whole church –
not just their friends!

[Brothers and sisters, there is *always* a danger that our friendships and closeness in the church
will turn into cliques and factions!

All of you need to be looking for how you can love and serve one another –
not just the people that you are closest to!

Indeed, you should be looking *especially* to those who are the most distant!]

And so Paul rehearses the institution of the Lord's Supper
in order to remind the Corinthians of what is happening at the Lord's Table.

2. “In Remembrance of Me” – the Eucharist as the New Covenant Meal (v23-26)

²³ *For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you,*

In rabbinic Judaism, this is the language you use
to describe the transmission of important traditions.
Likewise, Greek philosophers use the same language to speak of their central doctrines.

In other words, everyone who heard Paul say this would know
that Paul is saying *this is of central importance!*
In fact, in 1 Corinthians 15:3-5, he will use the same language to say,
“I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received:
that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures,
that he was buried,
that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures,
and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve.”

The Lord’s Supper is at the heart of Christian identity and Christian community –
because it is here at the Lord’s Table that we partake of Christ.

That’s why here in 11:23, Paul will use this language of
“I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you...”

that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread,

I have to point out that the verb “betrayed” is the same word translated “delivered”
earlier in verse 23.

I received from the Lord what I handed over to you –
that on the night when he was handed over, he took bread...

Our understanding of the Christian tradition –
of what has been handed down to us –
must start with the handing over of Jesus to his enemies.

Paul is writing to a church that is preoccupied with
“me and my own selfish way of doing things.”

(In other words, he’s writing to us!)

“that in the night when Jesus was handed over”
The Christian tradition is the tradition of the cross.
What is handed down from Jesus to the apostles – through all generations – to us –
is that when Jesus was about to be handed down to Pilate and Herod,

he took bread.

He took the ordinary food of ordinary people –

sure, it was a Passover meal,
but the point of Passover was also to take the ordinary food of ordinary people –

Jesus takes the ordinary
(Paul has pointed out at the beginning of 1 Cor-
not many of you were wise or powerful...)

²⁴ *and when he had given thanks, he broke it,*

The word translated “give thanks” is the word “eucharisteo” –
from which we get the word “Eucharist.”

Jesus gave thanks and he broke the bread.

The breaking of bread was a central moment in every Jewish meal.

The host would give thanks to God for his gifts,
and then break the bread and distribute it to his family and his guests.

And as Jesus broke the bread, he spoke those words of institution
which have been echoed from tables around the world every Sunday ever since!

and said, “This is my body which is for^[e] you. Do this in remembrance of me.”^[i] ²⁵ In the same way also he took the cup, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.”

There are four things that we need to hear in these words:

First, “This is my body/This cup is the new covenant in my blood.”

The church has divided more profoundly over these words
than almost any other phrase in Scripture!

Everyone wants to be more precise:

“this is transformed into my body”

or “this signifies my body.”

But Jesus doesn’t say that.

He says, “This is my body.”

If you want to understand what that means, look at the parallel:

“This cup is the new covenant in my blood.”

Moses had said, “Behold the blood of the covenant

that the LORD has made with you

in accordance with all these words.” (Ex 24:8)

In Jesus – the Word who became flesh and dwelt among us,

the book of the covenant and the blood of the covenant

become one and the same.

In the Passover meal, every Israelite in every generation

was to regard himself as one who was coming out of Egypt.

Even so, we who have been united to Christ in his death and resurrection
should now consider ourselves as those in Christ.

When Jesus says, “This is my body...
this cup is the new covenant in my blood”
we should believe what he says!
He says that his flesh is real food – and that his blood is real drink.

Second, he said “This is my body *which is for you.*”
I know, some say “which is broken for you” –
others say, “which is given for you” –
but it doesn’t matter – they all mean the same thing!
Jesus body is *for you.*

(How do I say this?
I don’t want you to miss either side of what Paul is saying!)

Jesus body is *for you* – so that you might share in his resurrection life!
But that’s not all Paul is saying.
If what has been handed over to us
came from the one who was handed over to death for us,
then Paul is also saying that this attitude should characterize us!

When Jesus says, “This is my body *which is for you,*”
we should believe that Jesus will do what he has promised,
and that he will sustain us, body and soul,
until he comes again –
not so that we can be selfish and proud –
but so that we can be conformed to his humility and love!

Third, Jesus said, “Do this...” “Do this, as often as you drink it...”
Do this. Practice this. Make this a regular part of your life.
Paul doesn’t say how often –
but he does say,
²⁶ *For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup,
you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

Eating the bread and drinking the cup
is a proclamation of the death of Christ.
It is a visible proclamation of the gospel of Jesus.

Every time we partake of the Lord’s Supper
the gospel is proclaimed.
It is a visible word.

Tonight we’ll be having the Lord’s Supper in the evening service as well.
Some folks are required to work Sunday morning –

so having communion in the evening is helpful for them.
Most of us, though, will wind up partaking in the eucharist twice.
And that's great!
Jesus did say "as often as you drink it..."

And fourth, Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of me."
To remember, in Scripture, is far more than an intellectual act.
When you remember the Lord, you are worshiping.
When you forget the Lord, you are committing idolatry.
Paul speaks of "remembering the poor" in Galatians 2:10.
To remember the poor means to provide for their needs.
Remembering transforms attitudes and actions –
because remembering is all about who you are.

How many movies have explored this question?!
If you lose your memory, who are you?
If you remember *nothing*, then that man sitting next to you, smiling sweetly at you
becomes rather creepy!
What you remember is what makes you who you are!

And Jesus says, "Do this in remembrance of me."

It's not really a "historical re-enactment" of what Jesus did.
Rather, like the Passover – and all the Feasts of Israel –
we are participating in what Christ did.
We come not to an earthly altar – like at Mt. Sinai or in Jerusalem –
but we come to the heavenly altar,
where Jesus is, seated at the right hand of the Father.

As Anthony Thiselton puts it,
"As in Israel's participation in the Passover,
assembled believers are brought 'there' to the cross,
to allow it once again to reshape their mind-set and their lifestyle." (AT 851)

Just as the Jews said that "*in every generation a man must so regard himself
as if he came forth himself out of Egypt' (m. Pesahim 10:5),*"
so also the Lord's Supper "witnesses
to the participant's self-involving appropriation of the cross
both for redemption and lifestyle
as those who *share Christ's death* in order to *share Christ's life.*" (AT 887)

²⁶ *For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup,
you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.*

"Until he comes"!
The eschatological focus of the Eucharist cannot be overlooked!

Our communal participation in Christ and our communal proclamation of Christ
is pointing together to that glorious day when he will come again!
“Until he comes”!

If you believe that he *is* coming to judge the living and the dead,
then it will affect the way you live!

Indeed, Paul says that if the Corinthians were *really* observing the traditions properly,
then they would be proclaiming the Lord’s death in their celebration of the eucharist –
and that proclamation would be reflected in the way they treated one another!

That’s why Paul concludes with a discussion of the dangers
of partaking in an “unworthy manner” in verses 27-34.

3. “In an Unworthy Manner” – Discernment and Judgment (v27-34)

The basic principle is found in verse 27:

²⁷ *Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord.*

I like Thiselton’s paraphrase of this.

He says that “will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord”
means that he will be “held accountable for the sin against Christ
of claiming identification with him
while using the celebration of the meal
as an occasion for social enjoyment or status enhancement
without regard to what sharing in the Lord’s Supper proclaims.” (890)

If you partake of the Lord’s Supper without regard for what the Lord’s Supper is all about,
then you are partaking in an unworthy manner!

Now it’s true that Paul is focusing on a particular problem in Corinth.

But the principle that he articulates here is valuable for all situations!

We don’t have the Lord’s Supper as a part of a communal meal in a patron’s home –
so we might be tempted to say that 1 Cor 11 doesn’t apply to us!

But Paul’s point is that if we are trying to use the Lord’s table for our own ends,
then we are partaking unworthily.

If we are doing this in remembrance of Christ,
then that remembering should shape us more into his image.

(He died for me – let me now die more and more for others!)

In verses 28-32, then, Paul provides counsel for how to prevent unworthy participation:

²⁸ *Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.*

This word for “examine” is the word used for testing gold.

The idea is a test for genuineness.
“Let a person examine himself” – test yourself.

What does that test look like?
Verse 29:

²⁹ *For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.*

To discern the body means to understand what this meal is.

I know that some people want to say that “discerning the body”
is all about recognizing the *church* as the body of Christ.
But in chapter 10, Paul has just finished talking about our participation
in the *body of Christ* in the *bread* of the Lord’s Supper!
(The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ?
The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ?)

We must discern the difference between this meal –
where we partake of the body and blood of Christ –
and all other meals!

But this does not mean that Paul has forgotten the double-meaning of the word “body”!
Yes, in verse 29, “discerning the body” means “recognizing Christ in the Supper” –
but already in verse 30, Paul is applying this to the church as body:

³⁰ *That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died.*^[g]

Paul says that those who partake of the Lord’s Supper in an unworthy manner,
may actually become ill – or even die!

I want you to understand what Paul is (and is not) saying.

Paul is not saying that there is a biological or medical connection
between unworthy participation in the Lord’s Supper and illness or death.

If you asked Paul,

“Is there a higher death rate among ‘unworthy participants’
than among the worthy?”

he would probably be puzzled by the question.

After all – “Everyone dies!”

But some people who grow ill and die

do so *because* they partake of the Lord’s Supper unworthily.

The Lord’s Supper, as Ignatius of Antioch put it around the year 110 AD,
is “the medicine of immortality” (Ephesians 20:2),

but, like most medicine, if you take it in the wrong way, it could be fatal!

Jesus promised that his body and blood will be our spiritual food.

Those who partake of his table apart from faith in him and love for his people will eat and drink judgment to themselves.

That's why Paul says that we should judge ourselves truly:

³¹ But if we judged^[h] ourselves truly, we would not be judged. ³² But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined^[i] so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

In verse 31, the word translated “judged” (if we judged ourselves truly) is the same as the word translated “discerned” in “discerned the Lord’s body.”

Paul’s point is simple:

If we discern the Lord’s body –
if we recognize Christ in the Supper,
then we will discern ourselves truly –
where *we* fit as members of Christ’s body.

But the Lord judges his church *now*
so that we will not be condemned (at the final judgment).

In this age, the Lord Jesus disciplines us –
he brings illness and death (sometimes as consequences for our sin),
so that we might not love sin any more!

³³ So then, my brothers,^[i] when you come together to eat, wait for^[k] one another— ³⁴ if anyone is hungry, let him eat at home—so that when you come together it will not be for judgment. About the other things I will give directions when I come.